



THE TRANSCASPIAN RAILWAY—THE NOMAD AND THE LOCOMOTIVE

[Frontispiece]

RECONNOITRING CENTRAL ASIA:

*PIONEERING ADVENTURES IN THE REGION
LYING BETWEEN RUSSIA AND INDIA*

BY

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against the Turcomans," "The Russian Advance towards India,"
"Merv, the Queen of the World," "Grodekoff's Ride to
Herat," "The Russian Railway to India,"
"Our Public Offices," etc*

"I am a great advocate for reconnoitring on all occasions, not only in war, but in
peace also"—GENERAL SIR CHARLES MACGREGOR.

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TO
R RUDDOCK, ESQ.,
EDITOR OF THE "NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE,"

This work is inscribed

AS A MARK OF PRIVATE ESTEEM AND
PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF THE BROAD AND PATRIOTIC
VIEWS HE HAS ALWAYS ADVOCATED IN REGARD
TO THE POLICY OF ENGLAND IN
THE EAST

P R E F A C E.

IN the following pages I have attempted to give a popular account of the principal pioneering exploits in the region lying between the Caspian and India. It would have been easy to have extended the series, so as to have included the very large band of explorers who have laid bare the geographical secrets of Kashgaria and the region adjacent. A moment's reflection, however, served to convince me that I should make it unwieldy by doing this, and that further I should distract the reader by calling away his attention from time to time to a part of Central Asia, having nothing in common with that extending from the Caspian Sea to the river Indus. Besides, Kashgaria possesses little interest for the English public,

while the area embracing Askabad and Merv, Bokhara and Meshed, Candahar, Cabul, and Herat, will continue to attract notice for many years to come, until at length the Central Asian Question solves itself by the junction of the frontiers of the two rival empires.

Many of the explorers, Russian as well as English, I know personally ; but this is a circumstance which I have not allowed for one moment to influence my opinions to the detriment of those with whom I am not acquainted. In my writings on Central Asia I try to arbitrate impartially between Russia and England, Liberal and Conservative, Russophobe and Russophile, and if I have failed on this occasion to deal with equal fairness, and with equal freedom from carping, ungenerous criticism, in treating of the achievements of the various Russian and English explorers, the fault is neither due to personal bias nor to narrow views of patriotism.

My generalizations are not hasty ones For

some years past I have had to deal almost daily with the books mentioned in this volume, in writing for the press and preparing my works on Central Asia. It was impossible, under such conditions, not to be continually instituting comparisons between the exploits of the explorers and the effect of them upon contemporary politics, while constant reference to their books for purposes of information could not but provoke closer criticism than is possible from a single reading for a chance review.

Some of the chapters originally appeared in a skeleton form in the columns of the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, and the work was completed after my return from the Tsar's coronation. While yet engaged revising it I was called away on a journey to the Caucasus and Caspian region, and when I came back the work had the benefit of a second revision, bringing all its information down to date.

GROSVENOR HOUSE,
PLUMSTEAD COMMON, KENT

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CHAPTER I

ARMINIUS VAMBERY'S JOURNEY IN DISGUISE TO THE KHANATES OF CENTRAL ASIA.

Commencement of the forward movement of Russia in Central Asia—Condition of the region—Early life of Arminius Vambery—Career in Turkey—Difficulty of assuming successfully a disguise among Asiatics—Conolly's advice on the subject—How Vambery orientalized himself—Anecdotes of the experiences that befell him—The great task Vambery set himself to achieve—His feelings on quitting Europe for the wilds of Central Asia—The horrors of the slave trade—A terrible spectacle—His journey to Khiva across the desert—Reception at Khiva—Denounced as a Frengih—Blesses the fanatic Khan—Is made to gorge himself by devotees till he wishes himself back in the desert—Gouging out the eyes of Turcomans—Nearly perishes in the desert journey to Bokhara—Boldly confronts the Emir—Makes his way to Afghanistan—Enters Herat a beggar—His interview with Yakoob Khan—"By G—I swear you are an Englishman!"—Makes his way home via Meshed—His subsequent career in Europe—His "Travels in Central Asia," and his services to England

"The sight of a map with blank spaces on it produces in me a feeling of mingled shame and restlessness. Of course it is not any particular fault of mine that maps have blank spaces on them, but I always feel the glaring whiteness of the blanks looking reproachfully at me. Judging from my own

feelings, I think it would be a good plan if the Geographical Society were to have all unexplored tracts painted on their maps some conspicuous colour, say scarlet, as the sight of these burning spots, thus prominently brought to their notice, would, I feel sure, rouse much of the latent energy of young Britons, and perhaps divert a good deal of it from mooning about the Row to more useful wanderings to unknown regions"—GENERAL SIR CHARLES MACGREGOR (*Wanderings in Balochistan*, page 2)

IN 1863, the public in England were greatly excited at the aggressive operations of the Russians in Central Asia. Three years previous had commenced afresh the forward movement towards India that had marked the reign of the Emperor Nicholas, but which had been suspended during and immediately after the Crimean War. In 1860, the Russians had taken the Khokandese fortresses of Tokmak and Pishpek, Kolpakovsky had routed 20,000 Khokandese at Uzun-Agatch, and the Orenburg authorities had established a naval station at Kazala, on the river Syr Daria. The following year the fortress of Yany Kurgan had been taken, and a post established at Julek. In 1862, the Khokandese had again experienced several defeats, and Russia was known to be organizing an expedition at Orenburg to renew the war the following spring. At this juncture,

when the eyes of England were fixed upon the menaced khanates of Khokand, Bokhara, and Khiva, a lame Hungarian took upon himself the task of trudging in disguise across the deserts of Central Asia, to ascertain for this country what the Russians were doing in the mysterious region beyond

For nearly twenty years the expanse lying between Russia and India had been left unvisited by European travellers. Previous to this nearly every portion of Central Asia had been overrun by explorers, of whom the names of Baillie Fraser, Arthur Conolly, Alexander Burnes, Wolff, Abbott, Shakespear, Tylour Thomson, and the Frenchman Ferrier, rise readily to the lips. But the collapse of the English expedition to Afghanistan, and the cruel murder of Stoddart and Conolly in Bokhara, had given Central Asia an evil reputation. Travellers had avoided it. By degrees mists had gathered over the khanates, and the public of Europe had come to regard Central Asia as an uncanny region, a prey to anarchy and murder, in which no Frenchman could show himself without risking a cruel and lingering death, or what was perhaps worse, lifelong

slavery among thousands of other unfortunates in Khiva and Bokhara. Only in 1860 the Turcomans of Merv had conquered and captured a Persian army, 20,000 strong, to a man, and after storing its cannon in their fortress—where they exist to this day—had sent nearly the whole of the captives to be sold as slaves in Central Asia. Such was the dread which, acts like these inspired, that no Englishman dared venture beyond the Persian frontier to see what the Russians were doing on the Aral, and it is a question whether even the intrepid Arminius Vámbéry would have undertaken his dangerous journey but for being able to perform it in disguise.

Arminius Vámbéry was born in 1832, at Duna Gzerdahely, situated on one of the largest islands in the Danube. “Impelled,” he says, “by a particular inclination to linguistic studies,” he had in “early youth occupied himself with several languages of Europe and Asia.” This led him later on to proceed to Constantinople, where several years’ residence in the Turkish houses, and frequent visits to Islamitic schools and libraries, soon transformed him into a Turk, if not an Efendi. For six years he acted as

translator in the Turkish Foreign Office, all the while increasing his mastery of the Oriental philology and acquiring a minute knowledge of the language and religion of the Eastern countries he meant some day to explore. In 1862 he left Constantinople for Persia, where he spent nearly a year, patiently familiarising himself with the people and country before taking in hand the enterprise, on which would be staked his liberty and life. At length he felt himself fit for the disguise he intended to assume—that of a dervish, which would enable him to travel to Central Asia in company with one of the bands of holy mendicants that were constantly passing between Khiva and Mecca.

Of the difficulty of sustaining a disguise among Asiatics, the explorer Conolly, who tried the *rôle* of desert trader in the Turcoman region, himself bears witness —“ If I were to travel again in such countries in the disguise of a native, I would take the character of a poor one, but I think that a European can hardly hope to escape detection, for, though he may be conversant with the idioms, his mode of delivery, his manner even of sitting, walking or riding—in short, his *tout ensemble*,

is different from that of an Asiatic, and the very care he takes not to betray himself gives him an air that causes him to be noticed. A man may, I think, get on best in the character of a French or Italian doctor. These itinerant gentry are sometimes met with, and as their country is supposed to be somewhere about the antipodes, they are not viewed with distrust. Among people so ignorant a Sangrado may pass for a great hakeem, the simplest medicines will cure their ailments, and you may tell those beyond your skill that it is not their *musseeb* (fortune) to be cured. No character will gain you such good treatment, and it has this great advantage—that it does not oblige you to conceal your religion, or, what is worse, to affect the Mahomedan. Few will question you, and you may make free use of the names of their most esteemed hakeems—Solerat and Bokrat, Sokman and Aboo Allee Seine, but if you should happen to meet a man of as great pretensions as yourself, and he should begin to try you with queries, ask him whether a shivering fever is a cold or hot disease ”

The task the lame man Vámbéry set himself to achieve was no easy one. It was simple

enough to assume the rags and dirt of a dervish, to wear a felt jacket and patchwork robe, to twine strips of ragged linen round his feet, and fix on his head an immense turban, "serving as a parasol by day and a pillow by night", but when it came to associating with the holy beggars, he found it a most anxious task to suppress his European habits, for, as he says, "we Occidentals eat, drink, sleep, sit, and stand, nay, I feel inclined to say, laugh, weep, sigh, and gesticulate, otherwise than Eastern people I shudder even now when I think back of the fatigue I underwent during the first few days, and how much I suffered from the wet and cold, the uncleanness—which makes one's hair stand on end—and the never-ending, harassing worry with the fanatic Sheeahs during our long and tedious daily marches in the Persian province of Mazenderan. Sometimes it rained from early in the morning until late in the evening, and, whilst not a thread of my tattered garments remained dry, I was obliged to wade for hours knee-deep in mud. Being conscious of my habit of gesticulating with my hands when speaking—a habit peculiar to many Europeans, but strictly forbidden in

the hairs, the religious sect of the individual may be inferred. The astonishment of some Bokhariots may be imagined when they discovered that my hairs neither inclined upwards nor downwards, but grew all round my arm. 'A remarkable Mussulman that!' they said, 'an unknown race'. And I am certainly regarded by many, even at the present day, as an abortion in the Islam growth of hair."

Setting out from Teheran March 28th, 1863, with a party of twenty-three hadjis, Vámbéry travelled along the Caspian littoral to the bay of Astrabad, making himself on the way good friends with his fellow-pilgrims, who were as savoury a set of mortals as one might pick out from the dirtiest dens of Seven Dials, and earning their respect and esteem by assiduous attention to his devotions. It was not without a certain amount of remorse and anxiety that he left Teheran behind. His enterprise was one that might have daunted the boldest heart. Central Asia at that period was a dark and mysterious region, peopled by cruel and fanatical Mussulmans who held in bondage tens of thousands of miserable captives torn from their border homes in Persia, Afghanistan,

and even Russia. The rulers of these Mussulmans were despotic sovereigns, habitually practising all the cruelties of Bashī Bazouks, and having at the moment a bitter hatred in their hearts against all Europeans, in consequence of the successes which the White Faces of the West had gained over their dusky troops on the shores of the Sea of Aral.

Apart from the ordinary perils of the journey, Vámbéry was conscious of exposing himself to four great risks. To reach the khanates of Central Asia he had to traverse the terrible and almost unknown desert between the Caspian and the Oxus, which in after-years became the grave of the greater part of General Markozoff's expedition against the Khivans. In making his way to this desert, and in passing across it, he had to slip through bands of roving Tekké Turcomans, people who had no respect for pilgrims, and would have made him a slave for life had they caught him on his journey. Having reached the khanates, an agonizing death awaited him if it was discovered he was a European, and there was a possibility, nearly realized in the case of Khiva, that the ruler might forcibly

compel him to take up permanent residence with his people. Finally, he was conscious that at any moment on the road it might be discovered that he was a false Mussulman, in which case even his warmest friends among the hadjis would consider themselves bound to put him to death.

stitution of man ! In the long struggle between us, fear was finally subdued, but it is this very struggle which I now blush to remember, for it is marvellous what efforts are required to grow familiar with the constant and visible prospect of death "

Travelling for a week, Vámbéry and his companions reached the bay of Astrabad, at the south-east corner of the Caspian. Here his secret was nearly discovered by a keen-eyed Russian, who remarked as the party touched at the naval station at Ashurada, in traversing the bay in a lugger—"Smotrite kakoi bieloi etot hadji!"—"See how white this hadji is!" From the island of Ashurada the Russians maintained a sort of police supervision over the south-east shores of the Caspian, the Turcoman inhabitants of which were accustomed to make piratical descents on the Persian coast and carry off people into perpetual slavery in the khanates of Central Asia.

Respecting Russia's right to conquer Central Asia and England's wisdom in opposing her, much argument may be expended, and many opinions expressed, but there is one fact that stands out clear from all controversy—the

conquest of Central Asia has been a blessing not only for Central Asia itself, but for all the nations abutting upon it. Cruel as have been some of the acts marking the conquest, and in spite of the defects of Russian administration, it is impossible for any man possessing the ordinary feelings of humanity to read the terrible accounts of the slave trade in Central Asia, prevailing up to the annexation of the region by Russia, without feeling thankful that the whole of the khanates have passed under the sway of the White Tsar.

In 1841, when Major Abbott visited the khanate of Khiva, out of a population of 2,468,500 people, 700,000, or about one in every three, were slaves. In the city of Khiva alone were 12,000 Heratis and 30,000 Persians, the rest of the slaves being scattered about the khanate as tillers of the soil. Writing of the same period, Wolff, the traveller, calculated that out of the two and a half million people composing the population of Bokhara, 200,000 were in a state of bondage. Burnes observed of a Bokharan village near the Oxus, in 1832, that, "though not boasting of more than twenty houses, there were yet seven or eight Persian

slaves, and these unfortunate men appear to be distributed in a like proportion throughout the country " *

When Vámbéry reached the pirate coast of the Caspian in 1863, the tide of Russian conquest was commencing to roll, which was destined in little more than ten years to sweep away the atrocious institution of slavery from nearly every corner of Central Asia, and restore thousands of captives to their long-lost homes

At Gomuch Tepé, the Turcoman fishing village where Vámbéry landed after crossing the bay of Astrabad, and where he was treated with the greatest kindness by the natives, "not a night passed," he says, "without a shot echoing from the sea-shore to announce the arrival of some piratical vessel laden with booty. In the morning my heart bled at the horrid sight of the poor Persians in the first moments of their misfortune "

How heart-rending these sights were, may be gathered from his description of one of them in

* For a full account of the horrors of the Central Asian slave trade, see "Merv, the Queen of the World, and the Scourge of the Man-stealing Turcomans " By Charles Marvin London W H Allen and Co , 1880

his "Sketches of Central Asia" —" I entered the tent of Khandjan after the morning prayer and found a noble company listening with the greatest attention to the narrative of a young Turcoman, who was covered with dust and dirt, and whose face bore evident traces of excitement and severe hardship. He was describing in a low voice, but in lively colours, a marauding excursion against the Persians of the evening before, in which he had taken part. Whilst he was speaking, the women, servants, and slaves (what must have been the thoughts of these latter!), squatted down round the circle of listeners, and many a curse was hurled at the slaves, the clanking of the chains on their feet interrupting for a time the general quiet. It struck me as remarkable that in proportion as the speaker warmed in describing the obstinate resistance of the unfortunate people who were fallen on unawares, the indignation of the audience increased at the audacity of the Persians not to have at once quietly submitted to being plundered.

"No sooner was the narration of this great feat of arms at an end, when all arose to their feet to have a look at the spoils, the sight of

which excites in the Turcoman's breast a mingled feeling of envy and pleasure. I followed them likewise, and a terrible picture presented itself to my eyes. Lying down in the middle of the tent were two Persians, looking deadly pale and covered with clotted blood, dirt, and dust. A man was busily engaged putting their broken limbs into fetters, when one of them gave a loud, wild shriek, the rings of the chains being too small for him. The cruel Turcoman was about to fasten them forcibly round his ankles. In a corner sat two young children on the ground, pale and trembling, and looking with sorrowful eyes towards the tortured Persian. The unhappy man was their father, they longed to weep, but dared not. One look of the robber, at whom they stole a glance now and again, with their teeth chattering, was sufficient to suppress their tears. In another corner a girl, from fifteen to sixteen years old, was crouching, her hair dishevelled and in confusion, her garments torn and almost entirely covered with blood. She groaned and sobbed, covering her face with her hands. Some Turcoman woman, moved either by compassion or curiosity, asked

her what ailed her, and where she was wounded 'I am not wounded,' she exclaimed, in a plaintive voice, deeply touching 'This blood is the blood of my mother, my only one, and the best and kindest of mothers Oh! *ana djan, ana djan* (dear mother)!' Thus she lamented, striking her head against the trellised woodwork of the tent, so that it almost tumbled down They offered her a draught of water, and her tongue became loosened, and she told them how she (of course a valuable prize) had been lifted into the saddle beside the robber, but that her mother, tied to the stirrups, had been obliged to run along on foot After an hour's running in this manner, she grew so tired that she sank down exhausted every moment The Turcoman tried to increase her strength by lashing her with his whip, but this was of no avail, and as he did not want to remain behind, away from his troop, he grew in a rage, drew his sword, and in a second struck off her head The blood spurting up, had covered the daughter, horseman, and horse, and, looking at the red spots upon her clothes, the poor girl wept loudly and bitterly

“ Whilst this was going on in the interior of the tent, outside, the various members of the robber’s family were busy inspecting the booty he had brought home. The elder women, seized greedily upon one or another utensil for domestic use, whilst the children, who were jumping about merrily, were trying on the different garments, now one, now another, and producing shouts of laughter

“ Here was all triumph and merriment, not far from it a picture of the deepest grief and misery. And yet no one is struck by the contrast, every one thinks it very natural that the Turcoman should enrich himself with robbery and pillage ”

After a prolonged stay among the pirates and robbers of Gomuch Tepé, Vámbéry and the pilgrims set off on their long and dangerous journey across the desert to Khiva. Before starting Vámbéry was exposed to some danger by the suspicions of a malevolent Afghan, a native of Candahar, who had been expelled that city during its occupation by the English in 1842 for a crime he had committed, and who recognised the traveller as a European by his features. Vámbéry had a deal of trouble

with this man but he played his part of dervish with such firmness and audacity that the rest of the pilgrims grew indignant at the Afghan's little rattle and made him hold his tongue.

Crossing the river Atrek, Vámbéry passed close by the spot destined in after-years to be the site of the Russian camp of Tchikishlar, the subsequent starting point of several expeditions against the Turcomins and trudging due north across the steppes lying between the Atrek and the Caspian emerged into the great desert of Kari Kum not far from the present terminal point of the Transcaspian railway, Kizil Arvat. Nowadays one can go by train and steamer all the way from Charing Cross to Kizil Arvat the journey occupying little more than a week but in Vámbéry's time the region was almost *terra incognita*, distant months of tedious and perilous journey even from Russia, and known only to the world by a short excursion which the brave explorer Lieutenant Arthur Conolly had made to the verge of the desert during his overland trip to India in 1829.

Both Vámbéry and Conolly traversed the country between the Caspian and Atrek during

the warm season of the year, when its scorched aspect inspired the belief that the character of the soil did not differ materially from the wilder waste of the Kara Kum. But since the Russians occupied the country it has been found that heavy rains clothe the steppes with grass in the autumn, and that wherever the water is stored, magnificent crops of wheat and melons can be raised in the summer. In course of time the region no doubt will be colonized by Cossacks and other Russian peoples engaged in pastoral pursuits, and roaming grounds will be formed for the huge flocks and herds which are now disappearing from South Russia with the growth of agriculture. In the meanwhile, in the northern part of the region, between Krasnovodsk and Kizil Arvat, Frenchmen and Russians are developing the naphtha deposits among the Little Balkan hills. One of these hills, known as the Naphtha Hill, consists almost entirely of a huge mass of naphtha and mineral wax, valued at £35,000,000 sterling. The district is called the "Black California," and promises to become in time an important industrial centre, from which will be sent fuel and oil to the cities and terts of Central Asia.



throughout which region both these necessities are dear and scarce.

In 1860 the Russians had no footing at all on the east Caspian coast between Fort Alexandrovsky, founded by Perovsky in 1834, and the island of Ashurada, occupied a few years later. It was not until six years after Vamberg's journey that Krasnovodsk was seized and thus, in proceeding from Gomuch Tepe to the fringe of the Kara Kum desert, the traveller had to pass between the littoral Yomood Turcomans on the one hand and the Goklan and Tekke Turcomans of the higher Atrek and Akhal oasis on the other. These tribes were professional slave-catchers kidnapping every unfortunate they could lay their hands on and selling them into captivity at Khiva or Bokhara. But fortune befriended Vámbéry. The desert was attained without attack, and after several days hardships under which a traveller of less indomitable will would have sunk the burning sands were left behind, and the Hungarian cast his rapturous gaze on the outlying settlements of the oasis of Khiva. Ten years later, a Russian column, marching to invade Khiva almost the same

direction as the pilgrims, collapsed miserably when half-way across the desert, and had to retreat, leaving half its numbers dead behind.

Khiva had been visited by several English and Russian travellers a generation earlier, and thus its characteristics were well known to geographers. But for many years no European had penetrated to the oasis, and English statesmen were consequently ignorant of the recent political and economic changes of a country, which was daily assuming greater importance by reason of the Russian advance. At that time so much was thought of Khiva as an outpost of India, that there were many able Englishmen seriously in favour of fighting Russia if she occupied the country.

To one coming from the sandy desert, the green pasture lands and cool tents of the Yomood Turcomans living on the edge of the oasis were inexpressibly refreshing. These warlike subjects of the Khan greeted the dervishes with the same simple hearty welcome they in after-years displayed to the Russian troops, despatched to perpetrate the shameful

Yomood massacre. Travelling a couple of days through their camp, the pilgrims reached

the Uzbek villages, on the outskirts of Khiva, the vegetation becoming more and more luxuriant the further they advanced, and the evidences greater of comfort and prosperity.

At the very entrance of the gate of the city they were met by several pious Khivans, who handed up to them bread and dried fruit as they sat upon their camels. For years so numerous a troop of hadjis had not arrived in Khiva. All stared at them in astonishment, and the exclamations "Aman eszen geldin ghiz!" ("Welcome!") "Ha shah bazim! Ha Arsz-limm!" ("Ah my falcon, my lion!") resounded on all sides in their ears. "On entering the bazaar, Hadji Bilal," says Vambery, "intoned a telkin. My voice was heard above them all, and I felt real emotion when the people impressed their kisses upon my hands and feet, yes, upon the very rags which hung from me. In accordance with the custom of the country, we dismounted at the caravanserai. Scarcely had the head of this, the Mehrem (a sort of chamberlain and confidant of the Khan), addressed the ordinary questions to our caravan leader, when the Afghan pressed forward and called aloud, 'We have brought to Khiva three interesting

quadrupeds and a no less interesting biped.' The first part of this pleasantry was of course applied to the buffaloes, animals not before seen in Khiva, but as the second part was pointed at me, it was no wonder that many eyes were immediately turned upon me, and amidst the whispers it was not difficult to distinguish the words 'Djansız' (spy), 'Frengih,' and 'Urus' (Russian) I made an effort to prevent the blood rising to my cheeks, and was upon the point of withdrawing, when the Mehrem ordered me to remain, using exceedingly uncivil expressions I was about to reply, when Hadji Salih, whose exterior inspired respect, came in, and entirely ignorant of what had passed, represented me in the most flattering colours to my inquisitor, who, surprised, told me, smiling as he did so, to take a seat by his side."

Hadji Salih made a sign to Vámbéry to accept the invitation, but assuming the air of one highly offended, and throwing an angry look upon the Mehrem, he retired and made his way to the house of a distinguished Khivan, whom he had heard had once lived at Constantinople This personage was delighted to see a Turkish

Efendi, who could tell him the latest news of the many acquaintances he had left behind at Stamboul, and when the traveller returned to the caravanserai it was with the consciousness that he had at least one friend to support him in any troubles at Khiva. To add to his satisfaction, he found that in his absence the irritated Afghan had been driven off with curses and reproaches by the Khivans, for his impiety in casting doubts on the sacred character of a dervish.

The next day the traveller was summoned to appear before the Khan. As the dervish approached the reception room the crowd gave way on all sides, and he was glad to hear the women exclaiming to one another, "Behold the dervish from Constantinople, who is to give his blessing to our Khan. May God give ear to his words!"

After the customary greeting with the Mehter, or Minister of Home Affairs, a pause elapsed to allow every arrangement to be made to impress the arrival from Stamboul, and then a curtain was rolled up, and Vámbéry saw before him Saïd Mahommed, Padishahi Kharezm, or, as he would be called in ordinary

prose, Khan of Khiva, sitting on a dais with his left arm supported upon a round silk velvet pillow, and his right holding a short golden sceptre.

Respecting his feelings at this critical moment Vámbéry says, "No European can realize to himself what it was to stand, a disguised Frenghi (this word of terror to the Orientals¹), face to face with such a tyrant as the Khivan khan, and to have to bestow upon him the customary benediction. If this man were to discover the dangerous trick, this man with the sallow face and sinister look, as he sits there surrounded by his satellites—such an idea is only endurable to the mind steeled to the highest pitch of resolution." Had he been discovered, the penalty would have been to have had his eyes gouged out, or to have been buried up to his chin in earth and then pelted to death with clay pellets, or to have been murdered in some other miserable and agonizing manner

With a firm step and a bold gesture, the false dervish raised his hands, being imitated by the Khan and the people present, and recited a short *Sura* from the Koran, then two *Alla-*

hamat Sella, and a usual prayer beginning with the words *Allahum Rabbena*, and finally concluded with a loud amen and prolonged stroking of the beard. Whilst the Khan was still stroking his beard, each of the rest exclaimed, "Kabul bolgay!" ("May my prayer be heard!") The dervish afterwards approached the Khan, who extended his hands to him, and when both had duly executed the *Musafeha*, or greeting prescribed by the Koran, accompanied by the reciprocal extension of the open hands, he retired a few paces, and the religious ceremonial was at an end.

The Khan now questioned him respecting the object of his journey and the impressions made upon him by the desert, the Turcomans, and Khiva. Vámbéry replied that he had suffered much, but that his sufferings were now richly rewarded by the sight of the *hasrets djemel* (beauty of his majesty). When asked how long he meant to stay, the dervish replied that he wished first to visit the saints who reposed in the soil of the khanate, and that he should then proceed further on. With respect to the money the Khan offered him, he added, "We dervishes do not trouble ourselves with

prose, Khairiety of colours, for the most part his left arm his enough bread is generally placed pillow, and sons, and the guest is to eat some sceptre. s. 'To be able to eat no more'

Respectington regarded by the Central Asiatic moment Vár or, at least, as indicating low realize to huy pilgrim brethren always gave disguised Frofs of their *bon ton* My only Orientals¹), that they could support the heavy the Khiva: upon one occasion I reckoned that him the them had devoured one pound of fat wern the tail of the sheep, two pounds of rice, without taking any account of bread, carrots, turnips, and radishes, and all this washed down, without any exaggeration, by from fifteen to twenty large soup plates full of green tea. In such heroic feats I was naturally a coward, and it was the astonishment of every one that I, so well versed in books, should have acquired only a half-acquaintance with the requisites of polite breeding!"

But it was not all "pleasure" at Khiva. Besides having to foil palace plots to ruin him, and evade a scheme of the Khan to marry him to an Uzbek woman and settle him for life in the oasis, he had to witness scenes of cruelty

which still haunt him in his dreams One day, on quitting the palace, he found in the outer court about three hundred Tchaudor Turcomans, prisoners of war, covered with rags, who had been captured in retaliation for the plundering of a Khivan caravan by their tribe "These were so tormented by the dread of their approaching fate, and by the hunger which they had endured several days, that they looked as if they had just risen from the grave They were separated into two divisions, namely, such as had not yet reached their fortieth year, and were to be sold as slaves, and such as from their rank or age were regarded as *aksakals* (grey beards), or leaders, and who were to suffer the punishment imposed by the Khan The former, chained together by their iron collars in numbers of from ten to fifteen, were led away, the latter submissively awaited the punishment awarded They looked like lambs in the hands of their executioners Whilst several were led to the gallows or the block, I saw how, at a sign from the executioner, eight aged men placed themselves down on their backs upon the earth They were then bound hand and foot, and the executioner gouged out their eyes

in turn, kneeling to do so on the breast of each poor wretch: and after every operation he wiped his knife, dripping with blood, upon the white beard of the hoary unfortunate. Ah, cruel spectacle! As each fearful act was completed the victim, liberated from his bonds, groping around with his hands sought to gain his feet! Some fell against each other, head against head: others sank powerless to the earth again uttering low groans, the memory of which will make me shudder as long as I live.

In those days men were hanged for casting a look upon a thickly veiled female. Women suspected of intrigues were buried up to the breast and pelted to death. As in Khiva there are no stones, hard pellets of earth were used. At the third discharge the poor victim was completely covered with dust and the body, dripping with blood was horribly disfigured: death alone put an end to her torture. Such scenes were varied by the arrival of horsemen with slaves and the heads of the Khan's enemies. The former were handed over as presents to the Khan, or some other great personage and the latter rumbled out by the sackful on the

ground in front of the Treasurer "As the bearded or beardless heads rolled out of the sack like potatoes, the Treasurer kicked them together with his foot until a large heap was formed, consisting of several hundreds. Each hero had a receipt given him for the number of heads delivered, and a few days later came the day of payment."

The Cossack, according to English ideas, is a stern ruler, but nobody who has lived in Russia and knows life in Central Asia can seriously pretend that the world in general, and Turkestan in particular, is the worse for the conquest of the khanates. The imposition of English or of Russian administration over the wild countries of Central Asia appears to me such a blessing, that whatever territory is unessential to the security of India, and the control of which we do not desire, I would freely allow Russia to annex.

It is not pleasant to reflect that if Russia had listened to English advice, remonstrances, entreaties, and threats, Khiva would have still been lawlessly independent, and that during the years that have elapsed since its conquest thousands of wretched beings would have been

tortured and killed with all those refinements of cruelty practised in Vámbéry's time

In spite of these barbarous usages, it was in Khiva Vámbéry says he passed the most agreeable days of his whole journey. The people were exceedingly kind to him. "I had only to appear in public, when passers-by, without any begging on my part, absolutely pelted me with many articles of attire and other presents. I took care never to accept considerable sums. I shared the articles of attire amongst my less fortunate brethren, always yielding to them what was best and handsomest, and reserving for myself, as became a dervish, what was poorest and least pretending. Notwithstanding this, a great change had taken place in my position, and to avow it openly, I saw with joy that I was now well furnished with a strong ass, with money, clothing, and provisions, and that I was perfectly equipped to continue my journey."

This lay further east, to the khanate of Bokhara, which is separated from it by a desert, split in two parts by the river Oxus, the northern, known as the Kizil Kum, the home of the Kirghiz tribes, and the southern, the Kara

Kum, roamed over by the Turcomans To get to Khiva, Vámbéry and his fellow-pilgrims had to traverse the desert, keeping in their course as close to the river Oxus as they could

“It was on a Monday, late in the afternoon, when we suspended the functions of conferrers of blessings, and extricated ourselves from the embraces that seemed as if they would never end, and quitted Khiva Many, whose zeal was transcendental, ran for half a league after us, their feeling of devotion forced tears from their eyes, and full of despair, we heard them exclaim, ‘Who knows when Khiva will again have the great good-fortune to harbour in her walls so many pious men!’”

The eight days’ journey from Khiva to Bokhara was marked with more physical suffering than perhaps Vámbéry anywhere else experienced during his travels In traversing the desert, the pilgrims’ water supply fell short, and they suffered terribly the pangs of thirst “Two of our poorer companions, forced to tramp on foot by the side of their feeble beasts, fell so sick that we were forced to bind them at full length upon the camels, as they were perfectly incapable of riding or sitting We

covered them over, and as long as they were able to articulate they kept exclaiming, 'Water! water!' the only words that escaped their lips. Alas! even their best friends denied them the life-dispensing draught, and when we, on the fourth day, reached Medemin Bulag, one of them was freed by death from the dreadful torments of thirst. It was one of the three brothers who had lost their father at Mecca. I was present when the unfortunate man drew his last breath. His tongue was quite black, the roof of his mouth of a greyish white, in other respects his features were not much disfigured, except that his lips were shrivelled, the teeth exposed, and the mouth open. I doubt much whether, in these extreme sufferings, water would have been of service, but who was there to give it to him? It is a horrible sight to see the father hide his store of water from the son, and brother from brother, each drop is life, and when men feel the torture of thirst, there is not, as in the other dangers of life, any spirit of self-sacrifice, or any feeling of generosity."

Nearly smothered by a scorching sand storm, the exhausted band trudged on, Vámbéry

experiencing such sufferings that he felt that "no death could be more painful." At last, on the outskirts of the desert, when all hope of surviving had nearly disappeared, the pilgrims came upon some Persian slaves, who assisted them to reach Bokhara

It strikes one as odd that in these remote and barbarous regions, as in more civilized Europe, the travellers' first acquaintance with a country should commence with custom-house officers. On reaching the Bokharan border town, the pilgrims were stopped, and their luggage examined with the same vexatious formalities practised at the frontier of every European state

The pilgrims thought their sacred character would gain them exemption from examination, but piety has no place in protective tariffs, and every article belonging to them was rigorously inspected and written down. Vámbéry was left to the last, "when the official, looking in my face, laughed and told me to show my trunk, 'for that we (meaning, probably, Europeans, as he took me for one) had always fine things with us' I happened to be in an excellent humour, and had on my dervish or

fool's cap. I interrupted the cunning Bokharan, saying that I had, in effect, some beautiful things, which he would see himself when he came to examine my property, movable and immovable. As he insisted upon seeing everything, I ran into the court, fetched my ass, and led it to him up the stairs and over the carpet, and after having introduced it, amid the loud laughter of my companions, I lost no time in opening my knapsack, and then showed him the few rags and old books which I had collected in Khiva."

Liberated from the custom-house officers, the pilgrims made their way to the city of Bokhara, where Vámbéry donned the native dress and lived for three weeks among priests and abbots. The metropolis of the most powerful khanate of Central Asia, Bokhara contained within its walls all manner of Asiatic comforts and luxuries to compensate the traveller for his hardships in the desert, and to refresh him while pursuing his investigations among the ruins of palaces, mosques, and tombs. Wherever he went he was surrounded by a crowd of inquisitive persons. "Ah! how they shook me by the hands, and how they

embraced me ! how they wearied me to death ! An immense turban crowned my head , a large Koran hung suspended from my neck , I had assumed the exterior of an ishan or sheikh, and was obliged to submit to the *corvée* which I had so provoked. Still I had reason to be contented for the sanctity of my character protected me from secular interrogation, and I heard how the people about questioned my friends, or whispered their criticisms to each other. 'What extreme piety,' said one, 'to come all the way from Constantinople alone in order to visit our saint Bahaeddin !' "

Suspecting he was a Frenghi, the Emir's officials did all they could by means of spies to penetrate his secret, but he baffled them. When they then invited him to a feast that they might entrap him in conversation, he started a theological discussion, and setting one Bokharan against the other, as one might do bigoted Churchmen and Dissenters in England, slipped quietly out of the snare. After this they left him in peace.

Having seen enough of the city of Bokhara, he travelled with the few remaining members of the pilgrim band to Samarcand, a journey

of six days. Shortly after his arrival the Emir Mozaffar Eddin entered in state on his return from a victorious war against the Khokandese, and the following day Vámbéry was summoned to see him alone. The suspicions the Bokharan officials entertained of the dervish had been transmitted to the Emir.

Mozaffar Eddin was quite a different personage from the Khan of Khiva. He was in his forty-second year, of middle height, and somewhat corpulent. He had a very pleasing countenance, fine black eyes, and a thin beard. When Vámbéry was shown into the audience chamber, the Emir was sitting on a mattress or ottoman of red cloth, surrounded by writings and books.

With great presence of mind, the dervish recited a short Sura, with the usual prayer for the welfare of the sovereign, and after the Amen, to which Mozaffar himself responded, Vámbéry took his seat, without permission, quite close to his royal person. "The boldness of my proceeding—quite, however, in accordance with the character which I had assumed—seemed not displeasing to him. I had long forgotten the art of blushing, and so was able

to sustain the look which he now directed full in my face, with the intention, probably, of disconcerting me 'Hadji, thou comest, I hear, from Roum, to visit the tombs of Bahaeddin and the saints of Turkestan'

" 'Yes, Sire, but also to quicken myself by the contemplation of thy sacred beauty,' " according to the forms of conversation usual on these occasions

" 'Strange! and thou hadst no other motive in coming hither from so distant a land?'

" 'No, Sire, it had always been my warmest desire to behold the noble Bokhara, and the enchanting Samarcand, upon whose sacred soil, as was remarked by Sheikh Djelal, one should rather walk on one's head than on one's feet But I have, besides, no other business in life, and have long been moving about everywhere as a *djihangeste* (world-pilgrim).

" 'What, thou, with thy lame foot, a *djihangeste*! That is really astonishing'

" 'I would be thy victim!' (an expression equivalent to 'Pardon me') 'Sire, thy glorious ancestor (peace be with him!) had certainly the

same infirmity, and he was even *djhanghir* " (conqueror of the world) *

This reply was agreeable to the Emir, who put questions to him respecting the impressions produced on him by Bokhara and Samarcand, and was so pleased with the Persian sentences and Koran verses with which he embellished his replies, that he presented him with a dress and thirty pieces of silver. After this scene the traveller was advised by his friends to quit Samarcand in all speed, not to make any stay even at Karshi, but to gain as rapidly as possible the further bank of the Oxus, where, amongst the hospitable Ersari Turcomans, he might await the arrival of the caravan for Herat.

The departure involved a final parting from the pilgrims, to some of whom Vámbéry had become really attached during his six months' adventures and sufferings with them. "My pen," he says, "is too feeble to convey any adequate idea of the distressing scene that took

* Timour, whom the Emir of Bokhara erroneously claims as their ancestor, was, as is well known, long since his enemies called him *Timur* (i. e. *Tamerlane*, the *Great* *Tamerlane*).

place between us, on both sides we were equally moved. Separation was in our case equivalent to death for how could it be otherwise in those countries where there was positively not a hope of seeing each other again? When we parted outside the city gate I wept like a child. My friends were all bathed in tears and long did I see them—I see them now—standing there in the same place, with their hands raised to heaven, imploring Allah's blessing upon my far journey. I turned round many times to look back. At last they disappeared, and I found I was only gazing upon the domes of Samarcand, illuminated by the faint light of the rising moon."

Five days journeying with a small caravan brought the traveller to the fortress of Kerkī, on the Oxus, bordering Afghanistan. From here Vāmbéry made excursions in various directions, notably one of four days' duration to Mazar-i-Sherif, near Balkh, a place of no great importance then, except as a shrine, but which has since developed into the capital of the Afghan possessions north of the Hindoo Koosh, and has become historical as the town where the Stolietoff mission stayed some time

before proceeding to Cabul, and where Shere Ali breathed his last after the promises of the Russian envoy had involved him in ruin

Recent events have rendered Vámbéry's wanderings in the region between the Oxus and Herat of great importance to England. With the exception of Grodekoff, he is the only modern traveller who has visited Afghan Turkestan and the outposts of the Hindoo Koosh—Balkh, Andkhor, Maimene, etc.—which Russia covets, and which some of her writers have declared can never be allowed to remain permanently in Afghan or English hands. Vámbéry saw the country when it consisted of a number of small independent states, or khanates, constantly at war with each other, and the victims from time to time of invasions from the Bokharans, the Afghans, and the Turcomans. Grodekoff, on the other hand, traversed the region after Shere Ali had conquered it and imposed Afghan rule—a cruel and odious despotism—throughout the length and breadth of the land.

In passing through these khanates, Vámbéry was so fleeced by the custom-house officers and local officials, that he entered Herat at the

close of his sixty years ago. They were generally a pauper.* The European writer who perhaps more than any other publicist has urged the necessity of safeguarding Herat, and who has more powerfully than any other person pleaded the cause of the inhabitants against their usurping rulers and conquerors, the Afghans, was condemned to wander about the streets and bazaars begging for broken victuals and pence to keep himself from starvation. The gloomy character of his position was only relieved by the fidelity of a young Tartar, named Mollah Ishak, who refused to leave his side, and cheerfully undertook the hardest part of the begging.

Herat had only two months earlier been taken by storm after a long siege by the Afghans, and still bore traces of the ruin wrought by the bombardment and the assault. The insolence and cruelty of the Afghans were beyond bounds, and the inhabitants openly expressed their earnest desire that the English would come and deliver them from their rapacious conquerors.

* The journey from Bokhara is usually performed by caravans in twenty days, but owing to local tumults and other causes, Vámbery's caravan was six weeks on the road.

To ~~proceeding~~ to Cabul, so enable him to proceed to Meshed, Vámbéry resolved he would pay a visit to the Governor-General of Herat, Yakoob Khan. This prince, who succeeded Shere Ali, and was deported to India for conniving at the massacre of Major Cavagnari at Cabul, was then in his sixteenth year, and had been left in charge of Herat while the Ameer proceeded to quell some disturbances in another part of his dominions.

Every day it was customary for Yakoob Khan to grant a public audience to anybody wishing to see him, and to vary the monotony of this, the prince used to sit in an arm-chair by the window and amuse himself with watching the drill of the troops outside. "He seemed highly delighted with the wheeling of the columns, and the thundering word of command of the officer passing them in review, who, besides, pronounced the 'Right shoulder forward! Left shoulder forward!' with a genuine English accent."

When Vámbéry reached the palace court the drill was at its most interesting point. The men had a very military bearing, far better than the Ottoman army, that was drilled in

the same manner forty years ago. They might, indeed, have been taken for European troops had not most of them worn on their stockingless feet the pointed Cabuli shoe, and short trousers so tightly stretched by their straps that they threatened every moment to burst and fly up above the knee.

“After watching the exercises a short time,” says Vámbéry, “I went to the door of the reception-hall, which was filled by a number of servants, soldiers, and petitioners. If all made room for me, and allowed me undisturbed to enter the saloon, I had to thank the large turban I had assumed (my companion Mollah Ishak had assumed a similar one), as well as the anchorite appearance which my wearisome journey had imparted. I saw the prince on the chair, on his right hand sat his vizier, and next to him there were ranged against the wall other officers, Mollahs and Heratis. Before the prince stood his keeper of the seal, and four or five other servants. True to my dervish character, on appearing I made the usual salutation, and occasioned no surprise to the company when I stepped, even as I did it, right up to the prince, and seated

myself between him and the vizier, after having required the latter, a corpulent Afghan, to make room for me by a push with the foot. This action of mine occasioned some laughing, but it did not put me out of countenance. I raised my hands to repeat the usual prayer, and whilst I repeated it Yakoob Khan looked me full in the face. I saw his look of astonishment, and when I was repeating the Amen, and all present were keeping time with me in stroking their beards, the prince half rose from his chair, and, pointing with his finger to me, called out, half laughing and half bewildered, 'Vallahi, billahi shuma, Inghiliz hestid!' ('By G——, I swear you are an Englishman!')

"A ringing peal of laughter followed the sudden fancy of the Ameer's son, but he did not suffer it to divert him from the idea, he sprang down from his seat, placed himself right before me, and, clapping both his hands like a child who has made some lucky discovery, he called out, 'Hadjı, *kurbunet*' ('I would be thy victim'), 'tell me, you are an Englishman in disguise, are you not?'

"His action was so naive, that I was really

sorry I could not leave the boy in his illusion I had cause to dread the wild fanaticism of the Afghans, and, assuming a manner as if the jest had gone too far, I said, 'Sahib, makun' ('Have done'). 'you know the Prophet's saying, "He who takes even in sport the believer for an unbeliever is himself an unbeliever" Give me rather something for my *fatihah*, that I may proceed further on my journey'

"My serious look, and the *hadis* which I recited, quite disconcerted the young man, he sat down half ashamed and excusing himself on the ground of the resemblance of my features, said that he had never seen a *hadji* from Bokhara with such a physiognomy I replied that I was not a Bokhariot, but a Stambuli, and when I showed him my Turkish passport, and spoke to him of his cousin, the son of Akbar Khan, who was at Constantinople in 1860 and met with a distinguished reception from the Sultan, his manner quite changed. My passport went the round of the company, and met with approbation The prince gave me some *kran*s, and dismissed me with the order that I should often visit him during my stay, which I accordingly did

“However fortunate the issue of this amusing proceeding, it had still some consequences not very agreeable, as far as my continued stay in Herat was concerned. Following the prince's example, every one wanted to detect in me the Englishman. Persians, Afghans, and Heratis came to me with the express purpose of convincing themselves and verifying their suspicions. But what was most droll, they thought they saw in me a man *à la* Eldred Pottinger, who made his first entry into Herat disguised as a horse-dealer, and became later its master. They insisted that I had a credit here for hundreds, even thousands, of ducats, and yet no one would give me a few krans to purchase bread ”

On the fifteenth of November, having scraped enough together to journey in a mendicant fashion to Meshed, Vámbéry set out with a caravan of two thousand persons, half of whom were pilgrims bound for the tomb of Imam Riza. Proceeding along the fruitful valley of the Hari Rud, the Persian frontier was reached on the second day, and ten days later, after many alarms in traversing a region ravaged by the Turcoman man stealers, the

caravan arrived at the capital of Khorassan. On the way, Vámbéry began to throw off his mask, and when he entered Meshed he no longer denied that he was a European.

Half-an-hour after his arrival he paid a visit to Colonel Dolmage, an English officer in the Persian service, with whom he was acquainted. He was attached to the prince-governor of Khorassan, and filled many important posts. When his servants summoned him he was still engaged at his official place of business. They announced Vámbéry as "a singular dervish from Bokhara." Colonel Dolmage hastened home, "regarded me fixedly for a long time, and only when I began to speak did he recognise me, and then his warm and tearful eye told me that I had found not only a European, but a friend. The gallant Englishman offered me his house, which I did not reject, and I have to thank his hospitality that I so far recovered from the hardships of my journey as to be able, in spite of the winter, in a month's time to continue my journey to Teheran."

The highway between Meshed and Teheran is so well known and so regularly traversed that

Vámbéry's uneventful journey along it needs no description, although it occupied him twenty-four days. At the Shah's capital he stayed another couple of months, the guest of the Turkish embassy, and then the fame of his exploits already spread about far ahead of him, and gaining him admiration and respect wherever he went, he started homewards, quitting Teheran for Europe on the 28th of March, 1864, the anniversary of the very day, a year earlier, he had commenced his journey to Central Asia.

No sooner was the safe termination of his travels known, than overtures were made to him to place his services at the disposition of the Russian Government. Had he accepted the offer, a lucrative appointment would have been his reward, and Russia on her part would have secured the most powerful pen in the subsequent Central Asian controversy. But Vámbéry did not approve of Russia's policy in Asia. His sympathies rested more with England. He therefore proceeded to London, where a hearty welcome was accorded by the public to the survivor of so many terrible dangers, and the graphic describer of them.

Returning later on to Buda-Pest, he accepted the professorship of Oriental languages at the university, and settled quietly down—strange as it may seem after such a display of adventurous spirit—to scientific studies, from which he has only allowed himself to be withdrawn from time to time to indicate in the European and English press the bearings of the Russian advance in the region traversed by him. His articles on the subject have given him a reputation as a political writer which throws into the shade somewhat the renown he enjoys among *savants* as an expert in the Tartar group of languages. As a linguist, he has few equals, speaking fluently twelve languages and writing in six. How remarkable his power over English is may be gathered from a perusal of his “Travels in Central Asia,” which for graphic description and forcible diction has few equals in our literature of exploration.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN MARSH'S RIDE FROM THE CASPIAN TO INDIA

Russian progress in Central Asia after Vámbéry's return—English policy—Captain Marsh sets out to ride to India—Remarkable growth of Baku—A new Russia developing in the Caucasus—The three Russian descents on the East Caspian coast—Seizure of Ashurada and Krasnovodsk—The railway between London and Teheran—Apathy of the British mission at Teheran—England without influence in Persia—Character of Marsh's ride through Islam—The raids of the Turcoman man-stealers—Crucifixion of Turcomans at Meshed—Journey from Meshed to Herat—Experiences of an English officer at Herat—Yakoob Khan and Captain Marsh—Ride from Herat to Candahar and India—Results of the journey—Sir Charles MacGregor on *chuppei*-riding in Persia

“ The possession of Herat by Russia means the possession of the one line by which India can be invaded The possession of Herat by England means the annihilation of all the Russian hopes of an invasion of India ”—COLONEL MALLESON, 1880 (*Herat*, page 877)

“ If the English were to establish a commercial and political preponderance at Herat, we should hardly be able to hold our own in Northern Khorásson and Meru ”—COLONEL M VENCLOFF, 1883 (*Russian Thought*, May, 1883)

AFTER Arminius Vámbéry's return to Europe in 1864, there was a lull in Central Asian travel for nearly eight years During that

time the Russians were incessantly fighting and advancing. In 1865, General Tchernayeff took Tashkent, in 1866, Romanovsky beat 40,000 Bokharans at Irdjar, and stormed the fortress of Khodjent, in 1867, the Russian province of Turkestan was formed, and Kaufmann appointed governor-general, in 1868, the Russians captured Samarcand, and completely crushed the power of the Emir of Bokhara, in 1869, Krasnovodsk, on the Caspian, was occupied, and a second base of operations against India established, in 1870, General Abramoff defeated the rebellious subjects of the Emir of Bokhara at the Kulikahan Heights, and rendered that sovereign still more the vassal of the White Tsar, in the same year, Michailovsk, the present starting-point of the Transcaspian railway, was founded, in 1871, the Chinese territory of Kuldja was occupied on one side of Central Asia, and the Turcoman region from the mouth of the Atrek to Kızıl Arvat annexed on the other side, finally, in 1872, preparations were commenced on a large scale for the conquest of Khiva. All this while England fumed and protested and took part in endless discussions, but, as is

usual with her in such cases, did nothing. The louder the talk, the less the action—such is a maxim Russian statesmen have learned to apply to this country, and never was it better exemplified than during the period extending from Vámbéry's return from Khiva to the departure of the second European pioneer for Central Asia. This pioneer was Captain Hippisley Cunliffe Marsh, of the 18th Bengal Cavalry, who rode in 1872 from Enzeli, on the Caspian, to Jacobabad, near the river Indus, *via* Meshed, Herat, and Candahar.

Marsh arrived at Poti, the principal Black Sea port of the Caucasus, on the 1st of September, 1872, and found the Russians busily engaged constructing the railway to Tiflis, whence it has been recently extended to Baku, on the Caspian. The journey between the two seas, travelling rapidly the whole time and allowing a day or two's rest at Tiflis, occupied him nearly a fortnight. It can now be achieved in thirty-six hours, and might be in twenty-four. Baku he found to be a quiet little town, deriving its importance more from being the dockyard of the Caspian than the seat of the petroleum industry of the Caucasus. Since

then vast alterations have taken place. Investigations have elicited that Baku contains more oil than Pennsylvania, millions of capital have been sunk in developing the industry, and scores of steamers—many 200 feet long—have been added to the Caspian marine to carry away the oil to the Volga, where several thousand oil trucks have been placed on the Russian railways to convey it to St Petersburg, Warsaw, and Odessa. Instead of the “one wooden jetty” of Captain Marsh’s time, twenty-five large piers now exist, and 7,000 vessels enter and clear Baku every year.

When Russia was conquering the Caucasus there were plenty of English politicians who advocated a policy of non-intervention and indifference, on the grounds that the conquest would prove a barren one. The rocks, they said, would only yield warlike hill tribes, whose marauding habits would provoke a drain on the Russian exchequer for generations to come. The Caucasus is now thoroughly subdued, brigandage is suppressed, and nearly every part of it, by means of railways and military roads, has been rendered accessible to the traveller and the trader. Instead of proving

a useless annexation, the Caucasus region has become a great field of colonization for the surplus population of the middle Russian provinces, and the magnificent plains to the north of the Caucasus and the lovely valleys to the south of it are now attracting an ever-increasing stream of Russian emigrants. Side by side with the agricultural development of the country, the rockiest district of it has been found to possess sufficient petroleum to supply the whole world. Thanks to the corn of Stavropol and the oil of Baku, a new Russia is growing up astride the Caucasus. The present outposts of this lusty state are Kars, Erivan, and Askabad. If Russia's progress in Asia continues at the rate it has maintained since the Crimean war, the outposts before the end of the century will be Constantinople, Tcheran, and Herat.

Leaving Baku in a steamer, Captain Marsh proceeded to the island of Ashurada in Astrabad Bay, where the Russian sailor had nearly penetrated the secret of Vámbéry's disguise by noting the whiteness of his skin. Here he saw a number of vessels on their way to Tchikishlar and Krasnovodsk with stores for the projected expedition to Khiva.

Everybody is familiar with the fierce and protracted struggle attending Russia's conquest of the west or Caucasian side of the Caspian. Successive wars had to be waged with Persia and Turkey, generations of conflicts fought out with native states and hill tribes, before the Caucasian region was finally subdued. On the eastern side of the Caspian, the conquest of the coast has been wholly unaccompanied by any such terrible expenditure of blood and money. The East Caspian littoral may be said to have been won by three swoops of the Russian eagle.

The first was in 1834, when General Perovsky descended upon the northern extremity of the coast opposite the mouth of the Volga, and established Fort Alexandrovsky among the Kirghiz nomads. The second was in 1841, in which year the war brig *Araxes*, without any previous warning, sailed into Astrabad Bay and seized the island of Ashurada, lying at the southernmost extremity of the coast. Finally, in 1869, Colonel Stolietoff—afterwards famous as the envoy at Cabul—with equal suddenness descended upon the coast at Krasnovodsk, midway between Alexandrovsky and Ashurada,

and completed the seizure of the East Caspian littoral.

When Ashurada was occupied, Russia meant the little island to have served as a stepping-stone to greater conquests inland. Her idea was to pass from it in course of time to Astrabad, the first of the four great cities—Astrabad, Meshed, Herat, and Candahar—stretching along the historical highway of invasion of India. The fierce opposition, however, raised by England and Persia to any further extension of territory inland checked this design, and Russia was compelled, after waiting many years in the hope of taking Astrabad by a direct attack in front, to shift her base of operations and approach it *via* Krasnovodsk and Kizil Arvat on the flank. When Captain Marsh arrived at Ashurada the game was in full swing, and many Russian officers, coming on board the steamer, told him, “while chatting over wine and cigars, that they hoped one day to take India from us, as it was their destiny to be paramount in Asia!”

Returning westward along the southern Caspian coast, belonging to Persia, Marsh landed at Enzeli, the port for Teheran, on the

morning of the 22nd. All his baggage consisted of four days' later set out with and tea, etc., stuffed. Islam ' to India

Six mules conveyed the traveller, a companion, then servants, and the baggage to Kasvin where they obtained ponies and pushed on with these to Teheran, which they reached after seven days' continuous ride. French engineers are now engaged constructing a railway from Enzeli to Teheran, and before long it will be possible to do the distance between the Caspian and the Shah's capital in a few hours. Direct railway communication will then exist between London and Teheran, and the journey will be feasible in little more than a week.

At Teheran Captain Marsh found that the British Legation knew nothing about what was going on at Meshed and Herat, although England paid the officials amply enough to have rendered them less remiss in discharging their duties. Further, he not only got no help and no information about the road from them, but attempts were even made to dissuade him from undertaking his journey. It is the characteristic of Russian officials in such matters as these to do their utmost to promote

and completed the seizure of Judging from the littoral.

... many other pioneers, when Assistance we shall make directly, it would appear to be the settled policy of the Foreign Office and India Office at home, and the legations abroad, to treat with disdain or indifference, or even to go out of their way to openly thwart, any explorer, not a Government agent, who seeks to perpetrate the dreadful crime of doing something for the good of his country.

Holding such inverted views of patriotism, it is not surprising to learn that the British Legation exercised in 1872 no influence whatever over the Shah, and that the sovereign of Persia was drifting into a course which has since completely rendered him the puppet of Russia.

Luckily, Captain Marsh was not a man to be turned aside from his enterprise by the indifference and opposition of those who ought to have assisted him. Completing his preparations without extraneous aid, he rode out of Teheran on the seventeenth of October, bound for India, with his servant behind shouting "Hosh" and "Kabardar" ("Have a care")

to clear the way. All his baggage consisted of a few clothes, a kettle, sugar and tea, etc., stuffed into four small saddle bags, of which two were carried by his servant's horse and two by his own. Before him lay a journey of 1,480 miles, of which half would be through Persia and the remainder through Afghanistan. The first day sixty-four miles were traversed, and the traveller put up at Ahoowon for the night. The next day he rode forty, and on the third arrived at the city of Shahrood, forty-five miles south-east of Astrabad, glad to get some regular food after subsisting up till then on bread and milk. Beyond here the road was exposed to Turcoman raids, and Marsh had intended travelling with a caravan, but, finding it waiting for the arrival of a lady of high birth from Teheran to accompany it, he pushed on without an escort to Meshed, and safely reached the city, unhindered by any adventures on the way. Hitherto Marsh had travelled *chuppar*, or post, and in European dress, he now assumed the disguise of a Persian and purchased a Turcoman horse, on which he travelled the remaining 900 miles to India.

As stated in the last chapter, Meshed is the

capital of Khorassan, and is governed by a governor-general, who exercises despotic sway over the territory lying between the Caspian and the Afghan frontier near Herat. In Marsh's time the entire road from the Caspian to Herat was open to the raids of the Turcomans, who used to murder travellers and villagers, or carry them off into slavery in Central Asia. In Khiva alone at that period there were more than 40,000 slaves. When Vámbéry penetrated to Central Asia eight years earlier, Khiva and Bokhara had been the two principal slave-holding states. In the interval Russia had conquered Bokhara and suppressed slavery there, and was now preparing, in defiance of England's threats and protests, to march upon Khiva and extinguish the execrable slave trade in that khanate also. Restricted now to one market, the slave-catching Turcomans could not dispose of the whole of their captives, and were adopting a new system of either holding their prisoners until they were ransomed, or keeping them as labourers in their own Akhal and Merv settlements.

So great was the fear entertained by the

pusillanimous Persians of the warlike Turcomans, that the mere sight of a few horsemen hovering in the distance would put a whole caravan in a panic. Conscious of the terror he inspired, a Turcoman would not hesitate to attack half-a-dozen Persians and would often succeed in making most of them prisoners. A Turcoman told Vámbéry that "the Persians, struck with a panic, often throw away their arms, demand the cords, and bind each other mutually. We have no occasion to dismount, except for the purpose of fastening the last of them."

As is always the case with cowards, the Persians inflicted fearful cruelties upon their courageous enemies whenever they fell into their hands. "On my way home from my visit to the prince-governor I saw a dreadful sight," says Marsh, in his account of Meshed. "On a dead wall, at the end of a lane, were three men crucified, they had large wooden tent-pegs driven through the hands and feet, and one through the back, with their faces to the wall. It made me shudder, one glance being sufficient. These unfortunates were three Turcomans the governor had lately caught

red-handed in a raid on some village in the neighbourhood. These wretches are the terror of the country, and richly deserve death, but not such a dreadful one, for, to prolong the torture, the peg through the back was left in. Had it been extracted, they would have died at once. Some caught before had been flayed alive, and left to die by inches. They told me that eighty chiefs of the Turcomans had been invited to a conference at Meshed, and had been treacherously seized. So much for the civilization of Persia! This was by the order of one of the most accomplished men of the time."

After a few days' stay at Meshed, Captain Marsh set out for Herat with an escort of forty sowars provided by the prince-governor, "a lot of wild-looking men, armed and booted for the road, with letters from the prince to the different places on the way." This escort was exchanged for another and smaller one at the first stage, and the greater part of the distance to the Afghan frontier was done with only two or three men. The week's ride was not a very eventful one, and although the Turcomans were out in every direction, none of

them came across the travellers. At Kafir Kaleh, an old ruined fort on the Perso-Afghan frontier, Marsh was deserted by the Persian escort, and had to push on to Kusan, the first Afghan post, ten or eleven miles beyond and in the full track of the Turcoman raids, without any protection whatever. Kusan is the most advanced outpost of Herat in this direction, and is situated sixty-eight miles from it. The place is small and ruinous, and could be captured at any time by a sotnya of Cossacks from Askabad. The Afghans treated the traveller well, and their attentions towards him increased every step during his three days' ride along the Hari Rud valley to Herat, which was reached on the 19th of November. There Captain Marsh was received with great distinction by the Eeshaghasi or Chamberlain, and "mobbed on all sides with salutations" from Yakoob Khan's officers. A suite of apartments was placed at his disposal, a guard was posted at the gate to keep off intruders, servants were sent to wait upon him, and, in short, Yakoob Khan did everything to minister to the comfort of his English guest.

Eight years had elapsed since the ragged

dervish Vámbéry had arrived in a poverty-stricken condition at Herat, and had nearly had his disguise penetrated by the youthful Afghan prince. In the interval the lad of eighteen had developed into a man of twenty-six, "well bred, with a pleasant, intelligent face, and a good voice." When he received Marsh—who donned his English uniform again—he conversed with him frankly in broken English about his affairs, and manifested the strongest sympathy for England. It is melancholy to reflect that a prince of such bravery and promise should have been converted by his long imprisonment by his father at Cabul into the weak and vacillating Ameer, who treacherously connived at the murder of Major Cavagnari. During the whole time of Marsh's stay at Herat, Yakoob Khan treated him as no other Englishman has ever been treated since in Afghanistan, and the people were so friendly that the officer was able to stroll about the streets freely in his uniform unattended, without any fear of insult or attack.

The ride of four hundred miles from Herat to Candahar was uneventful, and Marsh reached the latter city the second week in December,

after a day or two, he made his way to Sukkur, on the Indus. At this point, on the 10th of January, 1873, his 1,480 miles' ride from Teheran came to an end, the journey, including stoppages, having occupied him eighty-five days.

Geographically, very little was added to our stock of knowledge by this ride, and the work Marsh afterwards published, "A Ride through Islam," cannot be said to have given us an adequate account of the region traversed, being extremely thin and meagre. Perhaps this latter defect was due to the fact that he rode *chopper*, that is, he posted full speed through the country along the main roads, making scarcely any halts, and consequently merely glanced at it, as one might do from the windows of a railway carriage. "There are only two ways of travelling in Persia," says Sir Charles MacGregor "one is to march with other hired or purchased cattle, the other to ride *chopper* right through the country and try and beat every one who has ever gone before you. By the latter means you will cover a great deal of ground, take in very much of the country, see nothing of the people,

and arrive at your destination in a condition something between a skinned eel and a boiled lobster "

But if Marsh did not add anything of particular value to geographical literature, he certainly brought home with him military and political information of the highest importance. The Legation which had sought to prevent his journey was afterwards glad to use the data collected by him *en route*, and a Government which never rewarded him for his exploit found his ride to Herat and Candahar of immense value when it had to invade Afghanistan in that direction, and negotiate with the very prince who had received the English officer so hospitably during his journey.

The next time Marsh saw Afghanistan was in 1879, when the 18th Bengal Regiment—formerly the 2nd Mahratta Horse—was moved up to the frontier to take part in the Afghan war. In the interval, Marsh had risen to the rank of major, and a fellow-officer, Major the Hon G C Napier, son of Lord Napier of Magdala, had also added to the renown of the regiment by his surveys of the Turcoman frontier to the north of Meshed. At present

Marsh and his troopers are located at Peshawur, the former ready to ride off pioneering in Central Asia again at a moment's notice, the latter to give a good account of the Russians should they ever attempt to show themselves openly at all at Cabul

CHAPTER III

COLONEL VALENTINE BAKER'S VISIT TO THE PERSO-TURCOMAN FRONTIER

The Russians on the Atrek—Our lack of knowledge of their operations—Need of an Intelligence Office—The unexplored Perso-Turcoman border—Task undertaken by Colonel Baker, Lieutenant Gill, and Captain Clayton—A ton of luggage—Kindness of the Russian officials in the Caucasus—Arrival at Teheran and journey to Shahrood and Meshed—Baker hindered from going to Herat—Important results that might have attended his journey to that city—Proceeds to Kelat-i-Nadiri—His remarks on Nadir Shah's invasion of India—Growth of Russia's power east of the Caspian—Marvels of her advance—What our policy ought to be—Baker prevents a Persian raid upon the Turcomans—His account of the new Russian border—England negotiates with old maps, Russia with new ones—Baker prevented from going to Merv—His "Clouds in the East"—Value of his survey to England

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"We talk, and do nothing, 'tis shame for us all."—

SHAKESPEARE (*Henry IV*)

CAPTAIN MARSH in riding through Islam, from Teheran to the Indus, in 1872-73, had seen nothing of the Russian operations in Central

and Michailovsk have been made the principal ports of the Transcaspiian region, it is very unlikely the place will be heard of any more

At Astrabad he put up at the Russian consul's Gospodin Bakoulin, "a very intelligent and well-informed man," did his utmost to render the travellers comfortable. He made no secret of Russia's territorial claims to the Atrek region, and Baker saw at a glance how urgently we needed some one on the spot to sustain the local Persian officials against the intrigues and the pecuniary pressure of Russia. At Teheran, where no interests were suffering, we had half-a-dozen Englishmen idling at the Legation, at Astrabad, where only one was wanted, we had none at all.

From Astrabad the explorers made their way by land to Teheran, which they reached about the time the Shah arrived in London on his well-known visit. Resting a few days at the Persian capital, they started eastward again. They had not gone far, when Captain Clayton was attacked by fever, and had to return to Teheran, leaving Baker and Gill to continue the journey alone, along the desert skirt of the Elburz range, to Shahrood.

On their way the travellers had plenty of sport and a brush or two with robbers, and enjoyed themselves exceedingly. From Shahrood they travelled with a caravan, protected by a large escort, and underwent the usual vexations and annoyances of caravan travel in proceeding to Meshed. As none of the rumoured Turcoman raiding parties showed themselves at all on the way, they might have followed Marsh's plan and pushed on alone, although they would have incurred greater danger than he did, since, owing to their extensive baggage train, they did not enjoy the facility of movement possessed by that luggageless *chupper* rider the previous year.

From Meshed, Baker meant to have gone on to Herat, and thence *via* the Murghab river to Merv, following the course a Russian army would pursue in advancing upon the key of India from Turkestan in that direction. Instead of dropping in uninvited upon Yakoob Khan, however, as Captain Marsh had wisely done, Baker wrote to him from Meshed to announce his coming, and in this manner brought about the frustration of his enterprise.

In reply to his letter, Yakoob Khan sent an

Kelat This Tejend is the river that washes Herat. After passing Sarakhs it twists round to the west and flows into the Turcoman steppe, or desert, where it forms the Tejend oasis, lying between the Khorassan frontier and Merv. The Russians have a project for turning the water from the desert marshes into some old channels that would cause it to flow still further west to within sight of Askabad. They would then possess a watercourse running direct from Herat, and could advance along its banks at any time with the assurance of finding forage and water the whole distance

From Kelat, Baker went to Deregez, a little Kurd khanate on the Persian border, lying close to Askabad. The governor, Alayar Khan, residing at the chief town, Mahomedabad, received Baker well, and enabled him to forward a letter to the leader of the Merv Tekkés, Kaushid Khan, asking permission to visit Merv. In the interval he went hunting with Alayar Khan in the Turcoman country, killing boars and pheasants on the banks of the Tejend and reconnoitring the outlying settlements of Askabad. The chief of the escort, to amuse Colonel Baker, wanted to make a raid

on the Tekkè Turcoman settlement of Annau, now a Russian possession, just to show him what a foray was like, but the traveller disappointed him with a refusal "Firm as a rock, I said that if anything of the sort were attempted, I would send a letter to Alayar Khan, who would be very angry. The project was reluctantly abandoned, and below us, looking as peaceful as if war and rapine were unknown, lay the unsuspecting village—the men and boys lazily tending their herds, the women weaving carpets in the tents, and the children basking in the sun, never dreaming that their savage enemies were plotting murder and destruction just above them, and that a few short minutes would have sealed their fate. Little thought they that the Frenghi was whispering words of mercy on their behalf, and saving them from captivity and death."

Of the present Russo-Persian border beyond the Caspian Baker wrote—"Only those who have travelled long and far in Persia can imagine how refreshing it is to come across a plentiful supply of good water at every few miles, and this is the character of the entire northern slope of the Kuren" (and Kopet)

to the general who so bravely attempted its relief. Should English interests again become imperilled throughout the East, it is a satisfaction to know that we have at least one man on the spot willing to sacrifice himself for his country, and capable of taking a prominent part in the hour of danger. "You have one good general in your army," said Skobelev to the writer a few months before his death. "He is Valentine Baker"

CHAPTER IV

I. A MACGAHAN'S CHASE OF GENERAL KAUFMANN'S ARMY

The Russian expedition against Khiva—Three Englishmen go to the southern side of Central Asia, three Americans to the north of it—A special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* tries to get to Khiva and fails—Schuyler and MacGahan set out for the Aral region—Finding the Russians already gone from Kazan, MacGahan decides to chase them across the desert—Captain Verestchagin puts his veto on the undertaking—MacGahan succeeds in starting from Fort Perovsky—How he travelled as a man of peace—Experiences in the Kizil Kum—Horrible character of the desert—The five hundred miles' ride to Khala-ata—Kaufmann gone—Arrested by Colonel Weimarn, escapes the camp and pushes on—Exciting adventures in stalking the Russian army—Slipping through the Turcomans, he arrives at the Russian camp at the moment of victory—The capture of Khiva—The Turcoman campaign—MacGahan's thirty days' ride as a journalistic achievement—The failure of Robert Ker, his concoction of correspondence—Schuyler's journey and his book on Turkestan—MacGahan's after-career—His friendship with Skobelev

“MacGahan was universally esteemed throughout the whole Russian army, throughout the length and breadth of which his name was as familiar as a household word by reason of his exploits in Central Asia. He came in from

camp to Constantinople to nurse me when I was ill of the typhoid fever Two days later he fell ill himself, the disease taking the form of typhus with spots, it attacked his brain, which was the most vulnerable part of him by reason of long-protracted mental strain, and he died of convulsions at the end of a week"—LIEUTENANT GREENE, U S A (*Sketches of Army Life in Russia*, page 162)

WHEN, in the spring of 1873, three columns set out to invade the oasis of Khiva, the fear was general in England that the Russians would push their conquests further afield, and that before the war was over they would be at Merv or some other point in proximity to Herat Perhaps it was with the idea of arresting this movement that the three English officers—Colonel Baker, Captain Clayton, and Lieutenant Gill—made their way to the southern side of Central Asia. It is certain that if the fears of England had been realized, the presence of two good cavalry officers and one of the engineers on the spot would have been exceedingly opportune, and Baker and his companions might have made as grand a stand against the Russians, at the head of the natives, as Butler, Nasmyth, and Ballard had done on the Danube in the summer of '54 In that case, too, a rencontre might have occurred

at Meru was certainly portrayed by the magazine *Illustration* of Jules Verne. The three Englishmen finding their way to Meru from the south of Central Asia might have met there three Americans—or rather two and a *gringo*—coming with the Russians from the north. These three were J. A. McGahan, correspondent of the *New York Herald*, Eugene Schuyler, First Secretary to the United States Legation at St. Peterburg, and David Ker, correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. The former two were Americans, the latter was an English subject, but travelling with a passport as a United States citizen, so as to evade the regulation framed by the Russian Government prohibiting Englishmen from entering the newly-conquered territories in Central Asia.

It does not say much for the boasted enterprise of the English press that only one newspaper—the *Daily Telegraph*—should have sent a "special" to report the operations of the Russian army against Khiva, considering the stir and excitement its movements were occasioning in England in 1873. The Russian columns set out on their desert campaign early in March, and on the 8th of the month—the

Believing his journey would not last more than a week, and wishing to join the Russian army with as little delay as possible, MacGahan refused to take any camels, and thus had to leave behind such comforts as a tent, carpets, clothing, and extra provisions, which would have rendered his sojourn in the desert comparatively pleasant. "Had I known," he says, "how long I was doomed to wander about the desert, I would never have undertaken the journey with horses only."

Being a man of peace, MacGahan went lightly armed. "A heavy double-barrelled English hunting rifle, a double-barrelled shot gun, both of which pieces were breechloading, an eighteen-shooter Winchester rifle, three heavy revolvers, and one ordinary muzzle-loading shot gun, throwing slugs, besides a few knives and sabres, formed a light and unpretentious equipment. Nothing was farther from my thoughts than fighting. I only encumbered myself with these things in order to be able to discuss with becoming dignity questions relating to the rights of way and of property with the inhabitants of the desert, whose opinions on these subjects are somewhat peculiar."

The route adopted was the course of the Yanı Daria, a small stream which flows out of the Syr to a point a third of the way across the Kızıl Kum sands to Khiva. Four days ride brought the party to the extremity of this stream, where the Russians had built a small fort and dubbed it Blagoveschtschensk. The first two days of the journey passed off tolerably well, and the nights were pleasantly spent in Kirghiz tents, MacGahan's account of which makes one almost long for an opportunity of spending a holiday among the most hospitable of the Kızıl Kum nomads. He always found them, he affirms, "kind, hospitable, and honest. I spent a whole month amongst them, travelling with them, eating with them, and sleeping in their tents. And I had along with me all this time horses, arms, and equipments which would be to them a prize of considerable value. Yet never did I meet anything but kindness, I never lost a pin's worth, and often a Kirghiz has galloped four or five miles after me to restore some little thing I had left behind. Why talk of the necessity of civilizing such people?" The Kirghiz possesses to a remarkable degree the qualities of honesty, virtue, and

hospitality—virtues which our civilization seems to have a remarkable power of extinguishing among primitive people. I should be sorry indeed ever to see these simple people inoculated with our civilization and its attendant vices."

Of course, a traveller's treatment by natives very largely depends upon the demeanour of the traveller himself. Good-natured, genial, and frank, MacGahan rendered himself welcome wherever he went. Having made up his mind that the best policy for him to pursue was to trust the Kirghiz rather than make them fear him in his passage across the desert, his first act on arriving at a tent was to hand the owner his rifle to take care of, and the second to romp with the children, if any were about. Such behaviour won over at once the nomads, and he left behind as good an impression of himself in the desert as he carried away with him of the natives.

But the third and the fourth days in the Kızıl Kum were not so pleasant as the preceding ones. A storm arose in the evening, no friendly *aoul* or camp could be found, and the party had to pass a wretched night in the open,



KIRGHIZ HUNTING THE WOLF WITH WHIPS

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Cossacks and the Oxus, some seventy miles distant. Without water the journey could not be done, and to get it without being captured afresh seemed an impossibility. At last he remembered overhearing a scrap of conversation, while at Khala-ata, in which mention was made of another well somewhere between Adam Kurulgan and the Oxus, although no such well was known to Vámbéry. Of the position of this well he had no idea, but to his joy, the Kirghiz, on being questioned, said that there was water at Alty Kuduk, or the "Six Wells," twenty miles off, and that Kaufmann had left some troops there

To this point the party set off at once, MacGahan rightly reckoning on the probability of finding a different kind of commander from Weimarn there. On the way he had to quell a mutiny among his disaffected followers, who presumed upon the bribe of three hundred roubles (£30) he had given them the day before to induce them to slip from the camp with him, and displayed an insolent demeanour. The journey was not accomplished without severe hardships from heat and thirst, but in the end Alty Kuduk was reached, and the exhausted

riders received a hearty welcome from the astounded officers posted there. All the food and liquor the hospitable Russians had was placed at MacGahan's disposal, and after a nap the new-comer and his entertainers had a merry time of it. The advent of a stranger from Europe was a godsend to the officers, who were terribly low-spirited at being left behind in the desolate desert, and seemed to have only one pastime—that of “singing, to a most doleful air, a song they had adapted from the German, commencing ‘In dem, Altj Kuduk, da ist mein vaterland,’ into which they had introduced an astonishing number of variations.”

The next day, towards noon, MacGahan was in the saddle again, on the road to the Oxus. The officers tried to dissuade him from the enterprise, assuring him that he could not escape the Turcomans hovering round the army; but although he was not without apprehensions, and Mustruf knew very little more of the way than himself, he felt that there was as much danger from Weimarn's Cossacks behind as from the Khivan horsemen in front. As a matter of fact, only a few hours after his departure from Altj Kuduk, an officer arrived

same I was invited on all hands, twenty times a day, to eat or take tea. Indeed, until I reached Khiva, I made no arrangements for having my servants prepare meals for me, but simply lived on the community at large. And now, as I write, I cannot think of the hospitality which I received without a throb of grateful remembrance. I take this occasion to thank them, to thank not only those with whom I became intimate, but the many whose names I did not even know, but whose kindness and generosity I have experienced, and whose friendly faces I shall not easily forget."

MacGahan's subsequent adventures were interesting, although no more fighting took place until the commencement of the Turcoman campaign. Arriving at Khiva in advance of the Tashkent troops, the united Orenburg and Kinderley columns attacked the city, and after a severe struggle gained a lodgment close outside the walls. This was on the 9th of June. Finding resistance hopeless, the Khan sent a letter to Kaufmann proffering his submission, but the people, and above all the Turcomans, continued firing throughout the night, and the next morning Colonel Skobeleff and Count

Schouvaloff, heading a thousand men, carried one of the gates by assault, after which, clearing the streets, they advanced as far as the Khan's palace. There they learned that Kaufmann, with the Tashkent troops, was making a peaceful and triumphal entry on the opposite side of the city, by the Hazar Asp gate, and immediately returned again.

MacGahan gives a graphic description of the joyful meeting of the Russian conquerors in the midst of Khiva. But more striking still is his account of his adventures the night following the capture of the city, when he lost his way in the Khan's palace, and after blundering into the powder magazine, where the powder was lying loosely about the floor, stumbled upon the harem, the ladies of which entertained him in a most charming manner.

His stay in Khiva lasted five weeks. The Russian troops then commenced the disgraceful campaign against the Turcomans, which is known as the "Yomood massacre." This received political prominence in 1876, when Schuyler published some shocking details he had obtained from an eye-witness, and pro-

endeared Skobelev to Russia. He was the Skobelev of the English-speaking press. Between the two a close and unaffected friendship existed. "When MacGahan died," said a friend of both to the writer the day after Skobelev's death, "it was impossible to comfort Skobelev. He wept like a child."

To be wept over by a hero falls to the lot of few men in this world.

CHAPTER V

CAPTAIN NAPIER'S SECRET MISSION

English and Russian secret agents in Central Asia—Why should England indulge in cant?—Daood Khan's secret survey of Merv—A black man needs no commendation—Russophobe charges against Russia—Captain Napier's secret journey along the Perso-Turcoman frontier—His confidential report—How it came to be offered to the writer—A Russian staff officer on the value of secret surveys—England ought to have no secret reports—Official statement as to the objects of Napier's journey—His itinerary—Cannot blue-books be made more lively?—Jottings of a native spy—A Persian tailor and a farmer on the position of Russia and England in the East—Results of Napier's survey—England might have had Merv if her statesmen had been wiser—Merv geographically a part of Afghanistan—Napier's opinion of the evils that will result from a Russian occupation of the oasis

“Of public affairs you have information from the newspapers wherever you go, for the English keep no secret”—DR JOHNSON to SAMUEL WELCH, 1778 (*Boswell's "Life of Johnson"*)

IN dealing with the rivalry of England and Russia in the East, no charge is more frequently brought against the latter power than the

would be happy to lend me one of the twenty-five copies

An eminent Russian staff officer, who had been engaged in several secret surveys, once started in the presence of the writer and several Russian officials the discussion whether any real gain is derived from keeping Government reports secret. "We spend a lot of money," he said, "in obtaining reports of the military defences of Germany, and Germany does the same with us. The reports of both countries are printed, and are supposed to be known only to the officials of the departments concerned, but Germany somehow gets copies of our reports, and we equally somehow get copies of hers. Hence what is the good of secrecy? If our reports were published, the knowledge of the military condition of Germany would not be confined exclusively to a few officers, probably too lazy or too stupid to make use of it, but would be thrown open to the entire army. The army would invade Germany not ignorant of its defences, but thoroughly instructed as to their character. Unrecognised Von Moltkes might at their leisure improvise plans, and in general good would be derived

from the reports of the secret surveys instead of their living like mine ore in the dusty pigeon-holes of the General Staff Office, until the information in them rots and becomes useless.

Much might be argued for and against the publication of purely military reports dealing with the armaments of great powers, but where a report embraces mainly geographical matter as in the case of Napier's it seems to us absurd to hoard it up. At any rate this opinion should stand good with England. In Russia, where the policy of the country rests with a few officials the restriction of secret reports to the perusal of those officials does the State no harm. But the case is totally different with England where the policy of the hour depends not upon a few officials but upon the entire public. The better that public is instructed the sounder its policy is likely to be: hence reports such as Napier's ought always to be issued in the ordinary course of state papers.

The matter may be argued on other grounds. General Sir Charles MacGregor proceeds to Khorassan at his own cost, and travelling over most of the ground covered

see the British flag hauled down, than he will telegraph to Russia to march troops into Persia, and make it a Russian province like Turkestan. This simple fancy of the tailor amused me very much and made me laugh."

A few days later he met a farmer at a village near Astrabad. "I asked him what the revenue of his village was. He replied as much as the governor could exact. I said how could that be? He rejoined that Persia had no master, irregularity and disorder reigned everywhere. Had Persia had a master, the plain of the Turcomans would not have been made over to Russia, which is so fertile that one maund of seed gives an out-turn of a hundred maunds. He then said that the Turcomans were lucky that they became Russian subjects. They would no longer be subject to arbitrary exactions, and experience the tyranny of Persian rulers. I then remarked, 'How is it that you, being a Mussulman, prefer an infidel government to your own?' He answered, 'Russians are much better than these Mussulmans' (alluding to his governors), and then said, 'Go and see the Turcomans of Tchikishlar, how well off they are, they are getting richer

every day' He said that a single Russian could travel among the Turcomans without any risk, but the Persian governor of Astrabad could not go a few miles without a thousand men "

Captain Napier's survey was attended with one very important political circumstance Both the Tekké chiefs of Akhal and the Tekké chiefs of Merv made repeated overtures to him to be taken under the protection of England through the medium of Afghanistan So far as Akhal and the Atak were concerned, this was hardly feasible, but geographically Merv is an integral portion of Afghanistan, and England missed a grand opportunity when Lord Northbrook in India and the Beaconsfield Government at home failed to respond to the wishes of the Mervis

Already, six months earlier, Colonel Baker had discovered the Tekké Turcomans discussing the chances of an English protectorate. Napier found them ripe for the measure, and warmly seconded Baker's recommendation to the Government

"The strategical value of the position of Merv," wrote Napier, "requires no demonstra-

conceal his uneasiness. Both the home and the Indian Governments had refused to countenance Colonel Baker's survey in any way, but a month or two after his return to England—a week or two later than MacGahan's return from Khiva—they despatched to the Perso-Turcoman frontier Captain Napier. This officer paid a flying visit along the Turcoman frontier from Meshed and Kelat to Astrabad, but his report was a confidential one, and he added little to the knowledge that Baker had acquired in 1873. So little of his information was allowed to transpire that it did nothing to allay the public alarm, and in this manner circumstances provoked in due course the appearance of another pioneer in Central Asia.

This was no other than Colonel C. M. Macgregor, a scion of a family that has given so many illustrious officers to the army of India, and who was well known in 1875 as the compiler of two huge works on Central Asia and Afghanistan respectively, which contained, in an admirably arranged and condensed form, the whole of our stock of knowledge of the region. In preparing these works—which regrettably are confidential ones and inaccessible

to the general public*—MacGregor had come to know what gaps existed in the topography of Central Asia, and it was to fill in some of these that he prepared, early in 1875, to set out on a ride from India to Russia. A ride from Rawul Pindie to St Petersburg would have been unique, and would have surpassed any preceding achievement of the kind, but, unfortunately, MacGregor was thwarted in every possible way, and prevented from realizing it—this not by the Russians, but by the obstructive statesmen and officials of his own country.

In the first place, an order existed against officers entering Afghanistan at all—an order which, by the way, still remains in force. The explanation of this was that the Ameer refused

* The whole system of printing confidential reports in England is a farce. They are always known to foreign powers, from whom the "confidential" system is intended to protect them, and the general public are the real sufferers. This is, however, mitigated in a few instances. It is surprising the number of persons, wholly unconnected with the Government service, who have experienced no difficulty in obtaining access to MacGregor's works on Central Asia. In Russia their contents were known long before the Afghan war, and on the outbreak of that conflict, a certain London daily paper published whole columns of matter from the Afghanistan volume in the form of telegrams from Berlin, humorously heading the information as being derived from the reports of the Russian General Staff.

to hold himself responsible for the safety of any European traveller, and the English Government, to avoid complications, did its best to prevent officers penetrating into the country. Thanks to this, MacGregor, instead of riding straight from his station on the Indian frontier to Meshed, a distance of a thousand miles, had to pursue a roundabout route by sea, involving a journey of six thousand miles "I may be asked," he says, "why I did not, like Burnes, risk the danger of the shorter route, and I can only give the answer which would be given by scores of my brother officers, among whom the spirit to dare and the heart to do is as strong as ever it was in the days of old I would gladly have risked all that Afghan cut-throats could have done to me, but one cannot deliberately disobey orders"

MacGregor proceeded down country to Bombay, and thence, on the 26th of March, 1875, went by sea to Bushire, near the head of the Persian Gulf. Having recently lost his wife, the sixteen days' voyage, with no companions on board, was a miserable one to a desolate man, and he was glad to get on shore again—any land, even the wilderness at Bu-

the one hand, extolling him for his patriotism, and on the other censuring those in power in India who did their best to thwart him. It is such men as MacGregor who build up and sustain empires. It is such bureaucrats as those who censured him, who, by their folly and heedlessness, humble and ruin them.

The journey from the Perso-Afghan frontier to Meshed was accomplished by MacGregor in a week, the route lying through Shuhr-Now, of which road we possessed scarcely any information. The whole of the distance from the Herat valley to Meshed the traveller saw evidences of the disastrous character of the Turcoman forays. Between Herat and Meshed, a distance of 220 miles, there were only 1,000 Persian sowars, or armed horsemen, to protect the country. Through the thin and scattered line they formed, it was the easiest thing in the world for the Turcomans to pass in bands of from ten to 1,000 strong, and hence the whole country was more or less in a ravaged and ruined condition. "There was not a man," MacGregor says of one district, "who had not suffered some loss, and very few of the elder ones who had not been prisoners. One man

year before had lost his wife, two daughters, and a son by these dogs of Islam; and he was in the depths of despair. He knew he could never ransom them, he had nothing, and the price demanded was 3,000 *lari*. He said if he could only be sure they would take him to the same place, he would go and get taken himself. They all said that if the Kumuk (the ruling dynasty in Persia) were not such contemptible characters, they would go and take them and release their people—they would all go and fight the Turcomans. But they could expect nothing from the Shah, and they eagerly asked when the Russians were coming, adding, "May God send them speedily!" This showed how the fame of the Russians in releasing all the slaves in Khiva has spread, and to what extent they have most deservedly gained prestige by it."

At another place—"About half-way on the road we passed a ruined village called Farzabad, which, four years ago, the Turcomans had surprised when most of the men were out, and had carried off every soul—about a hundred—out of it. This information was

otherwise. Whether that letter was due to the sole unaided intellect of him from whom the order emanated, or whether I owed it to the promptings of any one seized by the curse of jealousy or the more withering canker of overzeal, it proved the extreme to which 'masterly inactivity' could go. Hitherto there had been some charm in the trip. The unknown in geography has always to me the same witchery that the candle has to the moth, or the flash of a woman's eye has to the hardest man. But this was all at an end, and it was with a sickening feeling that I remembered I was hundreds of miles away from civilization, separated from it by miles of dreary wastes and melancholy burnt-up hills, that I had marched all these miles, endured all these hardships, risked my health and my life, and spent my hardly won coin, for nothing. It never occurred to me to disobey the order, and I trust no soldier will think it ought to have occurred to me. It was so curtly distinct that it could admit of but one interpretation. It was perfectly clear that my further journey must cease unless I chose to resign my commission.

" 'Please, sir, breckfuss ready,' was my

incomparable boy's practical attempt to break the reverie into which I was plunged, sitting half-stunned by the bad news which the courier had brought me. Some letting off steam was absolutely necessary, so I did—d my boy, much to his astonishment, cursed Persia and the Persians in which he heartily concurred, and—for one must keep within bounds in recording one's thoughts of superior officers—wished those who had ordered me were at the bottom of the sea, with the millstone 'masterly inactivity' round their necks."

Judging from the fate of MacGregor and other English military explorers, no English officer desirous of taking in hand a survey ought to inform the Government beforehand of his intentions, otherwise he is sure to have them frustrated. As for any hopes of Government support, he may make up his mind at the outset that he will receive a chilling refusal, accompanied by the inevitable order forbidding him to carry out the most cherished part of his scheme. The happiest course for a would-be military explorer to pursue is, to hold his tongue until he has accomplished his self-imposed mission, and then to inform the

will ultimately force his way to the highest military position in the East

It is a satisfaction to know that, however much English statesmen may blunder, we have got in India men like General Sir Charles MacGregor to resist any eruption from the North that may some day take place, under the auspices of the Tchernayeffs and the Kaufmanns of Russia. If it be true that such men are the real supporters of our power in India, then the nation cannot be too proud of them

CHAPTER VII

CAPTAIN BURNABY'S RIDE TO KHIVA

Russian operations in Turkestan from the time of MacGahan's return to Burnaby's departure from London—The aim of the English officer—His advantages over other explorers—The railway to Orenburg—Burnaby's journey to the Sea of Aral—The ride thence to Khiva—The exploit not so difficult as commonly imagined—The dangers at Khiva overstated—The Khan of Khiva of Vámbéry's time, of MacGahan's time, and of Burnaby's time—The interview between the Khan and General Kaufmann—A tiger with pared claws—Burnaby unjust to the Russians—His interview with the Khan of Khiva—The Khan at the Tsar's coronation—Burnaby stops too long at Khiva, and is arrested by the Russians—His experiences at Fort Petro-Alexandrovska—His journey home—Review of his "Ride to Khiva"—Value of his exploit—England and her Burnabys

"Next the more temperate Turkmans of the South,
The Tekkes and lances of Salore,
And those from Atrek and Caspian sands,
Light men, and on light steeds, who only drink
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells'

MATTHEW ARNOLD

COLONEL C M MACGREGOR, foiled by his own Government in penetrating to Merv, arrived home from his eight months' ride on

the 15th of November, 1875 Fifteen days later another pioneer set out for the same strategical point, hoping to reach it, not from the southern side of Central Asia, as MacGregor had striven to do, but from the northern, or Russian side This was no other than Captain Fred Burnaby, of the Horse Guards Blue, who, thanks to the enterprise of his publishers and the advertising skill of the proprietors of a certain pill, has acquired a wider renown as a dashing explorer than any other traveller of modern times

The previous pioneer in the direction traversed by Burnaby had been MacGahan, who returned home from Khiva in the autumn of 1873 The close of that year and the greater part of 1874 passed over without any striking events in Turkestan The Russians, having been almost incessantly engaged fighting since 1860, needed a little breathing time to consolidate their conquests, and for eighteen months after the fall of Khiva did little beyond improve communications, organize garrisons, fix the relations between themselves and the natives, and prepare for further movements in the direction of India

On two sides of Turkestan—east and west—the Russian Government sought to extend its dominions on the east against Kashgar, where Yakoob Beg had carved an independent Mussulman state out of China and had entered into close relations with India, and on the west against the Turcomans dwelling within the triangle formed by Krasnovodsk, Khiva, and Merv. In 1873, 1874, and 1875 Colonel Ivanoff, MacGahan's good friend, led successive ravaging parties against the Turcomans of the oasis of Khiva, while Lomakin conducted expeditions up the Atrek and across the left flank of the oasis of Akhal to the sandy wastes of the Ust Kum. A notion prevailed in those days that it would be an easy matter to divert the Oxus into the Caspian, and thus open up a grand waterway from the Baltic and Volga to the riverine towns of Afghanistan and Bokhara. Hence these expeditions had for their object the subjugation of all the nomads of the country lying between the lower Oxus and the Caspian, so as to facilitate the accomplishment of this undertaking.

But while Russia was crushing the Turcomans on the west of Central Asia, and making pre-

had ridden from Herat to Merv and Khiva during the winter of 1839, to say nothing of his own personal acquaintance with winter life in Russia. If the snow and the frost were trying, they were hardly more so than the blazing heat of summer, which MacGahan experienced; and the snow at any rate, secured him against the possibility of death from thirst. His route from Kazala to Khiva lay through Kirghiz camps, and from Khiva to Merv through Turcoman ones, but MacGahan had shown that he had nothing to fear from the former, while our relations with the Merv Tekkés were so friendly that, barring the possibility of an armed rencontre without a preliminary parley to explain matters, he had little to fear from the latter. Besides, he had Mr MacGahan himself, who had been over the whole ground subsequently traversed, to coach him for the ride, he had Mr Schuyler again to assist him when he got to St Petersburg, and finally, on his arrival at Khiva, he could count on a Russian garrison being within hail in the event of the Khan attempting to ill-treat him. Add to these advantages a knowledge of Russ and Arabic,



a magnificent physique transcending that of most men and plenty of money to secure himself as much as possible against the discomforts of the journey, and it will be seen that Burnaby was very much less handicapped than many of his predecessors. We are not saying this in a carping or disparaging spirit, but it is hardly possible to treat of the exploits of a number of men in one and the same arena without instituting comparisons between them. Burnaby, in setting out for Khiva in 1875, did not have before him that black prospect of danger and death which MacGahan had had in starting on his thirty days' ride from Perovsky in 1873, or Vámbéry, in trudging from Teheran in rags to the torture dens of Central Asia ten years earlier.

Captain Burnaby set out from Charing Cross the last day of November, 1875, with eighty-five pounds of luggage. The journey to St Petersburg and thence to Orenburg was accomplished without any difficulty, and the delays that occurred at the latter place were nothing more than most travellers experience in a strange land in equipping themselves for a distant expedition. In 1875, the railway from the Volga to Orenburg

was not yet finished, and thus from Samara to that point Burnaby had to travel by the post road.* Since then the locomotive has penetrated to the Ural border of Russia, and one can travel from London to Orenburg under circumstances of greater comfort and ease, so far as the Russian and German sections are concerned, than one can from London to Newcastle. But the moment Orenburg is reached, all comfort is at an end. Beyond, to the eastern limits of Turkestan, extend the undulating plains, known as steppes, more or less grassy, in the direction of Siberia, but assuming a desert character in the neighbourhood of the Aral Sea, the Syr Daria and Oxus rivers, and west of them to the Caspian. The winter season being at its height, these steppes were covered with snow, and were far better adapted for travelling than in summer time, when the creaking and jolting of the *kibitka* or *tarantas* make one sigh for the smooth gliding of the sledge. There was no regular road The post

* The writer may mention that he spent the autumn of 1875 at Orenburg and in the Ural region abutting upon the Kirghiz steppes, returning to England shortly before Burnaby's departure

stations were little better than cowsheds, and, barring the halt at Orsk, the journey from Orenburg to Kazala, 664 miles, was but little more than a twelve days' continuous race across the snow, broken by breakdowns, snowstorms, quarrels with the post-masters, and other similar accompaniments of travel in Asiatic Russia—hardships and inconveniences that thousands of Russians, officers and officials, their wives and their families, recruits and time-expired soldiers, have experienced year after year since Yermak first conquered Siberia three centuries ago, and which these mute inglorious Burnabys will have to undergo without recognition or reward for a generation or so to come, until the iron horse replaces the steppe galloway, the metal road the camel track, and the inhabitants of far-distant towns of Siberia and Central Asia participate in the blessings of railway-travelling

“You will get on very well as far as Kazala,” had said MacGahan to Burnaby, “and then you will have to pull yourself together and make your rush, it is to be done, although the odds are rather against you” But, on reaching Kazala, Burnaby was very civilly treated, the

“A man about thirty, with a not unpleasant expression of countenance, when not clouded by fear, as at present ; large fine eyes, slightly oblique, aquiline nose, a very thin black beard and moustache, and a heavy sensual mouth. Physically, he is decidedly powerful, fully six feet three high, broad-shouldered in proportion, and weighs, I should say, between two hundred and fifty and three hundred pounds. He was dressed in a long khalat, or tunic, of bright blue silk, and the tall sheepskin cap of the Khivans. Humbly he sat before Kaufmann, scarcely daring to look him in the face. Finding himself at last at the feet of the Governor of Turkestan—the famous Yarim Padishah (Half-King)—his feelings must not have been of the most reassuring character. The two men formed a curious contrast. Kaufmann was not more than half as large as the Khan, and a smile, in which there was apparent a great deal of satisfaction, played over his features as he beheld Russia’s historic enemy at his feet. I thought there never was a more striking example of the superiority of mind over brute force, of modern over ancient modes of warfare, than was presented in the two men. In the

days of chivalry, this Khan, with his grand form and stalwart arms, might have been almost a demi-god, he could have put to flight a regiment single-handed, he would probably have been a very Cœur de Lion, and now, the meanest soldier in Kaufmann's army was more than a match for him

“ ‘Well, Khan,’ said Kaufmann, smilingly, ‘you see I have come to see you at last, as I wrote you I would, three years ago’

KHAN “ ‘Yes, Allah has willed it’

KAUFMANN “ ‘No, Khan, there you are mistaken Allah had very little to do with it You have brought it upon yourself If you had listened to my counsel three years ago, and acceded to my just demands, you would never have seen me here In other words, if you had done as I advised you, Allah would not have willed it’

KHAN “ ‘The pleasure of seeing the Yarim Padishah is so great, that I could wish nothing changed’

KAUFMANN (with a laugh) “ ‘The pleasure, I assure you, Khan, is mutual, but now let us proceed to business What are you going to do? what do you wish to do?’

KHAN. " 'That I leave to you to decide in your great wisdom. If I could wish for anything, it would be to become a subject of the Great White Tsar.'

KAUFMANN " 'Very well, you shall not be his subject, but his friend, if you will. It only depends upon yourself. The Great White Tsar does not wish to deprive you of your throne. He only wishes to prove to you that he is too great a Tsar to be trifled with, which I hope he has shown to your satisfaction. The Great White Tsar is too great a Tsar to take revenge. Having shown you his might, he is ready to forgive you, and let you retain your throne under conditions which you and I, Khan, will discuss another day '*

KHAN " 'I know I have done very wrong in not granting the just demands of the Russians, but I was ignorant and ill-advised. I will know better in the future. I thank the Great White Tsar and the illustrious Yarim Padishah for their great kindness and forbearance to me, and will always be their friend.'

* This magnanimous tone did not altogether coincide with the onerous conditions of peace afterwards imposed on the Khan

Kaufmann " ' You may return now, Khan, to your capital. Re-establish your government, administer justice, and preserve order. Tell your people to resume their occupations and their work, and they will not be molested. Tell them that the Russians are neither brigands nor robbers, but honest men, that they have not come to carry off their wealth, nor violate their women ' "

" After mutual questions about each other's health, and wishes for each other's prosperity, expressed in the most flattering language, the Khan retired, and returning to the city resumed his ordinary occupations. The first visit was followed by several others, at one of which the Khan assisted at the review of the Russian troops. It was amusing and interesting to watch the curious and astonished expression with which he looked at the filing past of the Russian troops. Their solid, regular tramp, and the short, queer shout which they uttered without turning their heads, when addressed by Kaufmann, gave them to his eyes a something very mysterious and diabolical. He reminded me of a half-frightened, half-amused, wondering some strange thrilling creature."

These, then, he must have thought, are the men who are conquering Central Asia ; before a handful of whom, whole Mussulman hosts went down at Samarcand like grass before the scythe ; these the devils, twelve hundred of whom took Tashkent, a town of a hundred thousand inhabitants, by storm, with a loss of half their number , before whose unholy breath the religion of Islam is disappearing from the earth ”

After the Khan's claws had been pared by the Russians, he was no longer the terrible sovereign he had been in Vámbéry's time. There was as much difference in the Said Mahommed of the two epochs as existed between Cetewayo in the height of his despotic power and the respectable portly old gentleman who subsequently visited England to ask to be restored to his country. There was a certain amount of risk incurred by Europeans in visiting Cetewayo when he was engaged in hostilities with England , but there was absolutely none after he became a humbled vassal, conscious of his inability to withstand our arms. Still more so was this the case with the Khan of Khiva, for the Russians

had not only deprived him of his army, but had posted in the Khanate a force capable of occupying his city with the greatest ease forty-eight hours after the perpetration of any outrage. Anybody who knows intimately Russian officers in general, and the commandant of Fort Petro-Alexandrovsk in particular, will agree with us that Ivanoff would have hurried to rescue Burnaby with as much speed and eagerness as if he had been a fellow countryman in distress.

But there was absolutely no fear of the Khan misbehaving himself, and if Burnaby gained at the time extra *clat* by setting forth in vivid colours a danger which never existed, there is no reason why he should not be deprived of it in measuring his achievements with those of other men. He had with him MacGahan's book, and in "Campaigning on the Oxus" the Khan was shown to have developed excellent traits of character after his conquest by the Russians. He had further talked before starting with MacGahan and Schuyler—the latter well posted up in the latest events at Khiva—and they could hardly have failed to tell him that there existed no

longer in Khiva any fanatic spirit against Europeans, and that the reports in the Russian newspapers represented the Khan as ruling the Khanate in an exemplary manner, and treating all visitors with consideration and respect. Hence there could be no possibility of a repetition of the cat-and-mouse scene immortalized by Vámbéry, and, to be plain, Burnaby's entry into Khiva was of itself not a whit more remarkable than the visit of an English tourist to the capital of any Indian feudatory prince

While magnifying the danger he ran in penetrating to Khiva, *before* reaching the city, the traveller subsequently ascribes the groundlessness of his fears to the calumnies of the Russians. In describing the gallows at Khiva he says "I must here remark that many of the cruelties stated to have been perpetrated by the present Khan previous to the capture of the city did not take place, indeed, they only existed in the fertile Muscovite imagination, which was eager to find an excuse for the appropriation of a neighbour's property." How far this was correct, the reader can judge for himself by referring to Vámbéry's account of

the gouging out of the eyes of the Tchaudor Turcomans, which Vámbéry, the Russian-hater, as he has been called, himself saw perpetrated. No Russian account of the Khan's administration was worse than that depicted by Vámbéry, and hence Burnaby must be adjudged to have calumniated the Russians when he imputed to them the dissemination of wilful mis-statements of the Khan's mode of rule.

On nearing Khiva Burnaby despatched a note to the Khan announcing his approach, and the morning after his arrival an escort of honour was sent to the house he had put up at to conduct him to Said Mahommed's presence. The Khan was in a *kibitka*, in the courtyard, reclining against some pillows and seated on a handsome Persian rug, warming his feet by a circular hearth filled with burning charcoal. He raised his hand to his forehead as the traveller stood before him, a salute which the latter returned by touching his cap. He then made a sign for Burnaby to sit down by his side.

Burnaby describes the Khan as "taller than the average of his subjects, being quite five feet ten in height, and strongly built." He thus

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makes him five inches shorter than MacGahan calculated him. The writer saw the Khan in 1883 at the Tsar's coronation, and he was certainly over six feet high, towering above most of the Russians at the balls and ceremonies,* although there were splendid specimens of the latter gathered at the imperial festivities. "His face," says Burnaby, "is of a broad massive type, he has a low square

* The Khan, with the other representatives of Asia, lodged in an hotel almost opposite the one at which I put up at Moscow. I was continually seeing him, although I had no opportunity of speaking to him, and so far as I could ascertain, he had nothing to complain of respecting his treatment. The only occasion that he seemed to me to have his vassal condition made manifest, was on the day of the Tsar's entry into Moscow. He then rode with the Asiatic deputation in front of the procession, mingled with 140 other Asiatic subjects of the Emperor. His size and weight were unpleasantly brought home to me one night at the conclusion of a court ball. The grand staircase of the Kremlin Palace was crowded with departing guests, when Said Mahommed appeared at the top with the Bokhariot prince and his suite. Waiting in vain a few minutes for a passage to be cleared for him, he decided to carve one for himself, and plunged down the staircase, like a burly Yorkshireman from the gallery of a London theatre. It is needless to say that the ladies and their cavaliers discreetly avoided arresting his course as far as they could help, but here and there pressure compelled them to bar his advance, and it was in executing a flank movement round one of these obstructions that he came in contact with my person, and left painful impressions of his weight.

forehead, large dark eyes, a short, straight nose" (or rather an aquiline), "with a coal-black beard and moustache. An enormous mouth, with irregular but white teeth, and a chin somewhat concealed by his beard, and not at all in character with the otherwise determined character of his face, must complete the picture. He did not look more than eight-and-twenty" (his real age was thirty-five), "and had a pleasant genial smile, and a merry twinkle in his eye, very unusual amongst Orientals, in fact, a Spanish expression would describe him better than any English one I can think of. He is *muy senpatico*. I must say that I was greatly surprised, after all that has been written in Russian newspapers about the cruelties and other iniquities perpetrated by this Khivan potentate, to find the original such a cheery sort of fellow." This was very bad of the Russian newspapers, but it should not be forgotten that when we English caught Cetewayo and tamed him, we discovered that, after all, he was not such a bad fellow as he had been previously painted by the English press, omitting to remember, as Burnaby did with Said Mahommed, that there was all the difference in the world

between Cetewayo the ignorant despot and Cetewayo enlightened by his conquerors.

Burnaby's interview with the Khan is so well known that it need not be repeated here. The Khan expressed himself dissatisfied with the Russians, which feeling one can readily understand, for they had stripped him of most of his glory and reduced him to the condition of a governor of a town. Recently he has grown more reconciled to his conquerors, with whom he has become better acquainted since he journeyed to Russia to attend the coronation of the Tsar. If he returned home from Moscow and St Petersburg thoroughly impressed with the might and magnificence of the Emperor, which he is said to have done, he must certainly have carried back with him a lively recollection of the kindness and consideration shown him, and the care taken on all occasions to prevent him realizing that he was a conquered prince.

Burnaby stopped some days at Khiva. Had he contented himself with a mere halt, and pushed on at once to Merv, he might have gained the renown which he had set out to seek and which in after years fell to Mr. O'Donovan,



THE KHAN OF KHIVA, AS HE APPEARED AT THE CORONATION OF
ALEXANDER III

[To see page 202]

of being the first European to penetrate to the "Queen of the World" in modern times. But instead of going ahead he decided to turn off towards Bokhara, where there was comparatively little fresh to be seen, and infinitely greater chances of being interfered with and turned back by the Russians. This resolve sealed the fate of his enterprise. While he was preparing to go to Bokhara, two Russians appeared at Khiva with a summons to repair to Fort Petro-Alexandrovsk, and the will of the commandant being law in Khiva, Burnaby had no other alternative but to obey it.

Six hours' ride the next morning brought him to Anca, a market town forty miles from Khiva, and a short journey the following day to the Russian fort. There Burnaby found that a telegram had arrived for him from the Duke of Cambridge, ordering his immediate return home. The document had been waiting for him several days at the fort, and in the event of his having gone first to Petro-Alexandrovsk he would have never seen Khiva.

"A little later, an officer brought a message from Colonel Ivanoff, to say that he had returned from shooting and was waiting to see me.

He is a tall man, considerably over six feet in height, but very thin, and of a German type, his whiskers having a decided Teutonic appearance. I was received by him at first a little stiffly, but his demeanour soon changed, and he began to laugh about my journey.

“ ‘Too bad,’ he said, ‘letting you get so far, and not allowing you to carry on your undertaking.’

“ ‘It was lucky,’ I remarked, ‘that I did not come here first.’

“ ‘Yes,’ said Ivanoff; ‘when I received the despatch, and found that you did not arrive, I sent back a special Tartar courier to Kazala, to say that you had probably gone on to Bokhara, and had thus given us the slip, but we should have caught you there,’ he continued.

“ ‘It is the fortune of war,’ I said. ‘Anyhow, I have seen Khiva.’”

Burnaby says Ivanoff here winced a little, but within the wince there may have lurked a facial shrug of satisfaction. Burnaby had set out to visit Merv, and Ivanoff had caught him before he got there. As for Khiva, it had been for some time out of the running, and a survey of it was only of limited value

Whether Russia was justified in preventing Burnaby reaching Merv, and whether the Beaconsfield Government were right in yielding to the diplomatic pressure exercised by Russia to bring about his recall, are points over which much argument might be expended. One feature of the affair, however, stands out clear. Numerous Russian pioneers were overrunning Central Asia at the time, and the English Government seem to have at once responded to the Russian demand, without endeavouring to obtain reciprocal treatment at the hands of their rival.

Bound to obey the command of the Duke of Cambridge, Burnaby had to prepare at once to return home, and that, according to Colonel Ivanoff's decision, by the shortest way, which was almost identical with the route he had previously traversed. Escorted by Cossacks, he safely accomplished the desert journey, three hundred and seventy-one miles, in a little over nine days, and with his arrival at the postal track at Kázala, his adventures, properly speaking, came to an end.

From one point of view his recall was advantageous. He reached home in the very nick

be a difficult matter to find plenty of instances surpassing it. To go no further than the limited arena selected for this book, his seven hundred miles' level ride through hospitable camps of tamed Kirghiz will not bear comparison with Marsh's 1,400 miles' ride through Persia and Afghanistan to India, flanked by Turcoman robbers and wild tribes most of the way, and attended at intervals with rough mountain travelling. Nor can it be placed alongside MacGregor's 3,000 miles' ride through the most unsettled parts of the Perso-Afghan region. Yet such is the capriciousness of fame, that while every schoolboy knows Burnaby by his ride to Khiva, not one Englishman in a hundred thousand is aware of Marsh and MacGregor's exploits.

In our opinion, the true merit of Burnaby's achievement consists in this—that an officer of wealth and rank could be found to leave his home at the gayest season of the year, and spend his holidays in performing a distant and arduous journey, amidst the severest climatic conditions, to reconnoitre the military position of a rival country, at his own cost and risk, for the sake of a State which, judging by its treatment of

previous explorers, would accord him no reward or thanks for his trouble. It is this self-sacrifice, enterprise, courage, and patriotism which has given the name of Burnaby a special and splendid significance in our language. To the majority of Englishmen Burnaby's name is not so much associated with exploration of strange countries, as typical of a class of officer ready at a moment's notice to secretly ride off and reconnoitre the position of England's enemy, no matter in what part of the world that enemy may be. MacGregor and Marsh, Baker and Stewart, were all of them Burnabys, and if any one has been transcended by the others in his exploits, the fact will be seen on examination to be largely due to circumstances over which the pioneer himself had no control. When MacGregor returned from Herat in 1875, we knew all we wanted to know for the moment about the southern side of Central Asia, and Burnaby would have wasted his energies in proceeding thither on another 3,000 miles' ride. But clouds had gathered over the northern side of the region. Burnaby took it to be his mission to dispel these mists, and without hesitation set off straight for

take upon herself the task of attempting to establish a waterway between the Oxus and the Caspian. But already the surveys of Petrusevitch and a number of less known explorers and topographers, the levelling operations of Glukhovsky, extending over a period of seven years, and the recent investigations by Lessar of the region between Sarakhs and Merv, and Merv and Khiva, have shown that a deal of the water of the Oxus that wastes itself in the Aral can be diverted half way across the desert without spoiling Khiva, that probably a branch can be established across the desert higher up from Tchardjui towards Merv, that the surplus waters of the Murghab or Merv river can be twisted towards the Tejend, and those of the Tejend again towards Askabad, so that if a real navigable waterway cannot be successfully established, the existing desert between the Oxus and the Caspian can be irrigated into cultivation in such a manner, that a more or less cultivated expanse will some day be formed between the Caspian and Khiva and the Caspian and Oxus, *via* Merv. When these improvements are effected, which, according to Lessar, can be done at a relatively small

outlay, the face of that part of Central Asia will be entirely changed. The clayey plains now marked "deserts" will be turned into grassy steppes like those of South Russia, and the herds of cattle and horses that are now disappearing from South Russia, owing to the encroachments of agriculture will appear again on the fertilised plains of Turkmenia.*

Petrusvitch's exploration of the Transcaspiian deserts provoked a strong desire in his heart to effect this transformation, but there seemed little hope of it ever falling to his lot to achieve it. He was but a mere geographer, and although the survey he conducted in 1876, and again in 1878, along the Perso-Turcoman frontier, in the footsteps of Baker and MacGregor, added slightly to his fame as an explorer, still it did not open out to him any influential administrative career. For the sake of his topographical knowledge he was retained at Tiflis as counsellor to the Caucasian Government, and to a certain class of mind this would

* An important effect is likely to be exercised on the climate of Central Asia by the reforesting of Turkestan, commenced under the auspices of General Tchernyeff. In the spring of 1883 upwards of 100,000 trees were planted in Southern Turkestan.

tion from the coast, Lomakin, as the senior officer of the force, resumed control of the operations, and hurrying on to Dengeel Tepé, or Geok Tepé, was so shockingly thrashed by the Tekkés that the Government had no alternative but to withdraw him completely from the Transcaspian region. General Tergoukasoff was thereupon sent to take over the command of the remnants of the Atrek army, until the Government had decided when and in what form to conduct another expedition, and Petrusevitch was ordered to Krasnovodsk to replace Lomakin in the civil administration of the country.

At Krasnovodsk, Petrusevitch earned golden opinions by his admirable conduct.* He had none of the usual characteristics of the Russian frontier official—he did not drink, or smoke, or play cards, or intrigue with women, his honesty was beyond question, and the natives found in

Petrusevitch, beginning to read from it in Russ a series of arguments why it would be better for them to surrender. “Stop!” exclaimed Lazareff. “I don’t want to send them a book. Put that in the archives, and just write half-a-dozen lines, telling them that we mean to have their country, and that if they don’t submit at once we’ll smash ’em”!

* During my recent journey to the Caucasus I heard nothing but good of Petrusevitch.

him a warm and zealous protector. A Russian gentleman, who visited him at the great stone house Lomakin had constructed as the official residence at Krasnovodsk, thus describes what he saw there —

“On reaching the Governor's house, the orderly told us to pass through the drawing-room to the cabinet beyond. Before we had even reached the half-opened door of this a pleasant voice called out to us to enter. As we did so an officer in green uniform rose from a table loaded with books and papers, and advanced to meet us. It was General Petrusevitch—a man a little above the medium height, with a rosy face, a long, light-coloured beard, a broad, handsome forehead, and a pair of bright intelligent grey eyes. From the two book-cases, crammed with books, and the piles of books scattered about everywhere, it was easy to see that the General was a person of literary tastes.

“After transacting business, we had a talk, and I willingly accepted Petrusevitch's invitation to dine with him. The company consisted chiefly of military men. General attention was excited during the dinner by the remarks of an

engineer, who had just returned from surveying the course of the projected railway across the steppe to Kizil Arvat. He laid great stress on the fact that, although this was the first time he had ever undertaken long marches in a waterless country, he had nevertheless always been able to keep four or five miles ahead of his escort without feeling any inconvenience from it, and hence considered that most of the talk he had previously heard of the difficulties of desert marching was pure moonshine. Petrusevitch, who was listening attentively with bended head, here suddenly interrupted the boaster with the inquiry :—

“ ‘ And what, my dear sir, let me ask, did you carry on the road ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Carry ? Nothing, ’ replied the engineer

“ ‘ Nothing ! And a soldier, you know, has to carry a rifle, cartridges, water, provisions for several days, his great coat, etc. You are now returning to St. Petersburg. May I beg of you to eliminate from your conversation all such boasting as this, since there are quite enough persons there already who consider the precautions superfluous we are taking to secure the comfort of the troops during

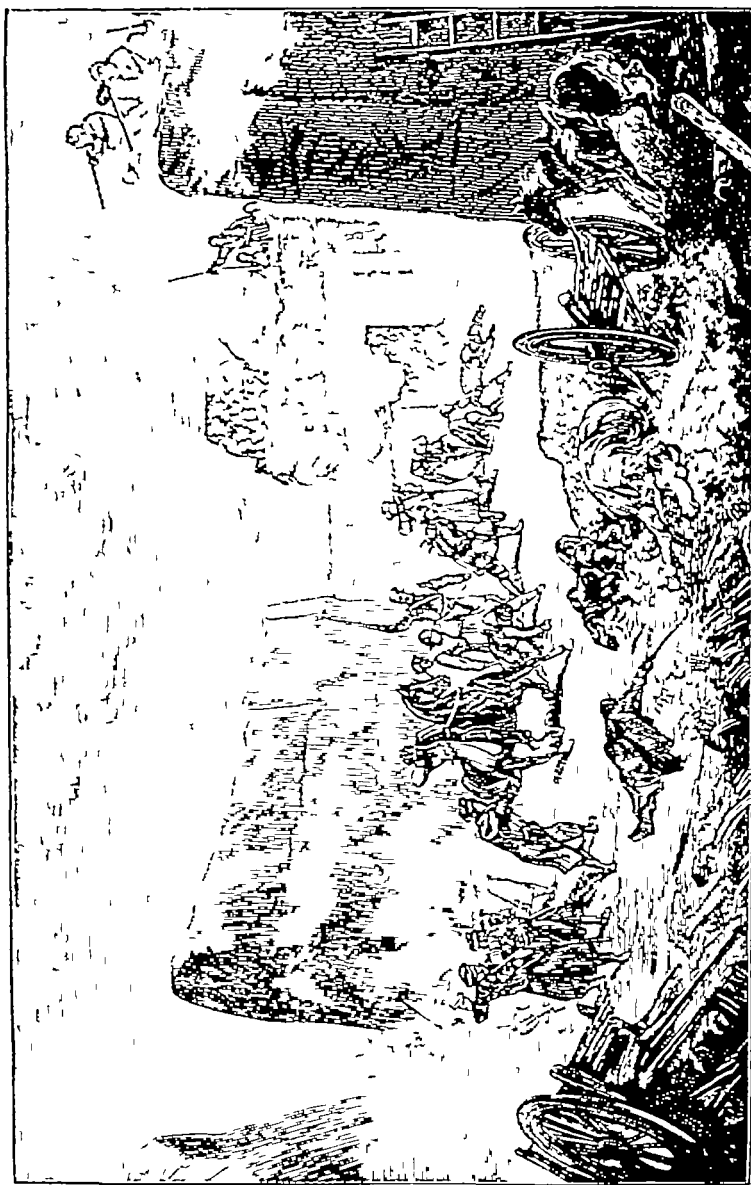
their impending march under a burning sun ?’

“Receiving intelligence that a large distilling apparatus, established by the Caucasus and Mercury Company to supply Krasnovodsk with water, had become, after a stoppage of two months, a complete failure, in consequence of which the railway works had had to be suspended, Petrusevitch put his hand to his head and exclaimed ‘The devil only knows what’s to be done. It is only the press that could help us in this—the newspapers would at least serve to expose the culprits.’ At this moment the Policemaster of Krasnovodsk entered, and announced that the man who had stolen the five-rouble note (10s) had been caught. ‘There you are,’ exclaimed Petrusevitch ironically, ‘we can always catch a man who steals a five-rouble note, but only let us try and find out who is to blame for erecting worthless boilers to the distilling apparatus, and we are sure to fail. Everybody has an excuse for himself, and does not hesitate to lay the blame upon the Almighty.’”

Three months after this Skobeleff arrived at Krasnovodsk, and preparations were at once

made for the campaign Petrusevitch took a prominent part in the task of organizing the expedition, and when the final advance took place he proceeded to the front as one of Skobelev's immediate assistants. His aid was invaluable in the reconnaissances that preceded the investment of Geok Tepé, and he greatly distinguished himself at the capture of the outlying fort of Yangi Kala. Two days after the occupation of this point, Skobelev decided he would not make a direct attack on the fortress, but approach the walls by a regular siege. To divert the attention of the Tekkés from the laying of the first parallel on the night of the 3rd of January, Petrusevitch was ordered to attack with a force an outlying position some distance to the right of the Russian camp. This was tenaciously held by the Tekkés, and the general, in riding into an enclosure to animate the Cossacks, was struck by a bullet and fell dead from his horse.

The death of the explorer was all the more untimely and melancholy from the circumstance that only a few days previous he had had the happiness of finding that he had secured the affections of an amiable lady, who had joined



the force as a hospital nurse with a number of others, headed by the Countess Miliutin, the daughter of the Minister of War. Skobelev was bitterly vexed when he heard of his death. He had such a warm regard for Petrusevitch that he could not control his emotion before the troops. By his orders, all the officers and men who had fallen in the fight were carried to a point outside the camp to be buried, and after a funeral service had been performed over them, the whole of the cannon belonging to the army fired a simultaneous volley into the fortress, whence, says a Russian writer, "cries and groans directly afterwards issued, showing that our iron tears had not been shed in vain."

At the close of the siege the body of the general was sent to the Caucasus, to be buried in a little village belonging to one of the hill-tribes in Daghestan he had ruled with such success in the earlier part of his career. Krasnovodsk, from which he had meant to superintend the works for irrigating and rendering fit for colonization the country lying between the Caspian and the Atrek, has been abandoned by his successor. The Governor of Transcaspia rules to-day at Askabad, 350

miles further east of Krasnovodsk, and 350 miles nearer India. Nothing for the moment is being done to carry out Petrusevitch's colonization project in the country between the Caspian and Atrek, but the notion of twisting and diverting the rivers in the steppe to render them subservient to Russian interests has passed from Petrusevitch to General Komaroff, who is busy striving to shape the Tejend in such a manner as to create a waterway from Askabad to Merv on the one hand and to Herat on the other.

CHAPTER IX

CAPTAIN BUTLER, THE SECRET ENGLISH AGENT

The remarkable siege of Geok Tepe—Excitement occasioned in England and Russia by the fighting—Captain Butler claims that he fortified the place—Never near it—The public and explorers—Butler's journey along the Perso-Turcoman border in 1876—Sent again in 1878 to lead the Turcomans against the Russians—Butler a wrong agent for a mission of this kind—O'Donovan upon his pretensions—Some of his alleged adventures in Persia—The English Government placed in an awkward position by his disclosures of his mission—Their effect on the policy of Russia in the Akhal-Ikkek region—The Government throw him over—Fate of Butler—Another of O.K.'s misstatements—Effect of the journeys of Butler, Baker, Napier, and MacGregor on the Turcomans of Akhal and Merv—The trouble they caused Russia and the barrier they opposed to her operations—What English officers may do to strengthen and defend the Empire

“ Before mine eyes thou hast set, and in mine ear
Vented much policy, and projects deep
Of enemies, of aids, battles, and leagues ”

MILTON

IN the opening month of 1881, a remarkable conflict took place on the confines of Trans-

caspian Persia, which provoked considerable interest and sensation in Europe. A tribe, which all travellers had concurred in describing as unfit to fight behind walls, although excellent warriors on horseback, suddenly improvised a Plevna, and, notwithstanding that they had no artillery and only short-range muskets, while the enemy—commanded by Russia's best general—possessed seventy cannon, and were armed with breechloaders, maintained for three weeks such a desperate defence, that for a time it seemed as though the invaders would at length be driven back, baffled and beaten, to the Caspian. During this exciting crisis, a letter appeared in the *Globe* newspaper, in which the writer affirmed that—"In truth I can claim with pride that for two and a half years at least, by constructing the fortifications of Geok Tepé, I have helped a brave and heroic people to retain their liberty, and my constant prayer is that my friends (the Turcomans) will act as heroically at the two spots further east I have chalked out for them as they are acting within the beleaguered earthwork of Geok Tepé." The writer of this letter was Captain Francis Butler, the place

he said he fortified he never cast eyes on or was near in his life, and the two points—as strongly fortified as Geok Tepé—he said the Russians would find further east have never yet been found by their generals or explorers

There are two tendencies in people with regard to their views of travel. One is to exaggerate the dangers and difficulties of a journey in foreign parts, the other to speak disparagingly of the accuracy and achievements of explorers. Thus, Burnaby's ride to Khiva has often been spoken of as a unique achievement, instead of regarding it as an exploit transcended by hundreds of others, and possessing in all its essential features nothing out of the common of every-day travel in Asiatic Russia. On the other hand, it has almost invariably been the fate of travellers who have penetrated to unknown or little known places to have discredit cast upon their statements. We laugh at the King of Siam who lost his patience when the European spoke, among other marvels, of rivers being frozen over in winter in the Far West, but the same spirit of incredulity prevails in more enlightened commu-

with the Indian Government. It had been intended by Lord Lytton that his mission should be a secret one, but the Russian Government got wind of it,* and made representations which caused our authorities to order Butler home. On his arrival in India he made a claim for money in excess of the sum supplied him by Lord Lytton for the journey, which the Indian Government refused to allow him. Consider-

* Writing to the Marquis of Salisbury, under date July 3rd, 1878, our Ambassador at St Petersburg, Lord Augustus Loftus, said —“ M de Giers, the head of the Russian Foreign Office, admitted that he had sent M Bakouline, the Russian Consul at Astrabad ” (who had treated Colonel Baker so hospitably in 1873), “ to watch the movements of Captains Butler and Napier, who were reported to be inciting the Turcoman tribes to hostilities against Russia. I (Lord A Loftus) stated to M Giers that Captain Butler was a mere traveller on his own account ” (the Ambassador was apparently unaware Butler was the paid agent of the Viceroy, whether the home authorities were equally ignorant is doubtful), “ and no agent of Her Majesty’s Government, and that urgent orders had been sent to him by the Commander-in-Chief in India to return to his military duties. M de Giers, who appeared to be well informed both in regard to Captain Butler and Captain Napier, stated that he was aware that Butler had been recalled, but that, nevertheless, he had refused to obey the orders he had received ” (which seems to have been correct), “ and was persisting in his intention to visit the Akhal tribes. He referred even to the letters which Captain Butler had addressed to certain Turcoman chiefs, of which His Excellency had evidently received copies ”

ing that Butler, in excess of failure, had furnished reports on which no reliance could be placed, the decision has a certain amount of justification. But Butler did not subscribe to this view, he allowed statements to go forth that he had been a secret emissary sent by Lytton to lead the Turcomans against Russia, that he had been thrown over because the Viceroy had not the moral courage to support him in the face of Russian remonstrances, and that the only reward he had received for his geographical discoveries, his hardships, and his narrow escapes from death, was that he had been sent back to his regiment in disgrace, with several hundred pounds of expenses disallowed him.

The press in England and India took the matter up, and unluckily the controversy started at a moment when the Liberals were doing their utmost to discredit the acts of the Beaconsfield Government in India. The case of Captain Butler thus served as an admirable weapon in the hands of those who vehemently oppose all action against Russia in Asia. This did not tend to improve the feeling which had grown up between the Indian Government and Butler. But the worst was to come, and

ment of Geok Tepé, the Tekkés believed officers would arrive from Candahar to lead them against the enemy, and when the stronghold was captured, a splendid white charger, richly caparisoned, was found in a stable, which the defenders had kept all along for the expected English commander.*

Had Colonel Baker and his successors not visited the Persian border, the Turcomans, left to themselves to arrange matters with the Russians, would have no doubt submitted within a year or two of the fall of Khiva. The opposition existing in England to their annexation, and the efforts of our legation at Teheran to protect them, would have been unknown to the Tekkés, and without this stimulus they must have been soon discouraged in their unequal struggle for independence. But the incessant visits of warlike English officers altogether changed the condition of things. They made no secret that both England and England's legation at Teheran were striving to save them from the Russians. Anybody who

* Skobeleff gave this to the Emperor shortly before his death

has read the books of these pioneers, and knows anything personally of the writers, can easily imagine them saying, in their brave soldierly style—"Don't you give in to the Russians. England is doing all she can to prevent them taking your country, and if you can only hold out long enough, there's a chance that she'll step in and help you lick them."

Such language as this, held out year after year, could not but have the effect of buoying up the Turcomans, and causing them to fight with greater vigour. Putting ourselves in Russia's place, it is easy to understand why she felt all along aggrieved at the presence of these officers on the Turcoman border, and why she was always complaining of them. It is no exaggeration to say that the journeys of Baker, MacGregor, Napier, and Butler did more to arrest the Russian advance than all the solemn deliberations of successive English cabinets, the sackfuls of diplomatic correspondence, the miles of parliamentary speeches and questions, and the myriads of newspaper articles published on the Central Asian Question between 1873 and 1881.

Their efforts were in vain. Abandoned by

son on a journey round the world, and engaged Pashino to accompany him* A third time, in the course of his travels, he paid a visit to India, and also made his way to the Burmese Court, where the King spoke in very contemptuous terms of the English to the Russian visitors. When he returned home, the Turkish war was at its height, but he did not long

* On the day of the Tsar's coronation I was stopping for a while in one of the stands near the Uspenski Cathedral in order to watch the Emperor proceed thence to the palace, when a very shabby and dissipated young man made his way to the reserved seats immediately behind me, close to where Mr. George Augustus Sala, in court costume (his cocked hat and dirk causing the spectators to take him for a British admiral), was busy penning the wonderful account that was to appear the next morning in the *Daily Telegraph*. "I cannot understand," observed the correspondent of another paper to me, "how, with all their precautions, the authorities should have allowed such a dissipated-looking person to come to this stand. He looks just the very sort of man to make an attempt on the Emperor's life." I rejoined with some equally uncomplimentary remarks, shortly after which the person referred to got up, and calmly observed, in a casual sort of way, in English, "You're making plenty of notes to-day." It was not the first time a similar *contretemps* had occurred to me in Russia, and therefore, without being abashed at his having understood our conversation, I ignored what we had said and fell to interrogating him. It then came out that he was a son of one of the cotton-spinning Khludoffs—his father had four mills—and was cousin to the young man who had been escorted round the world by Pashino. The latter he knew well, and he gave me some interesting particulars about him.

remain inactive. At the instigation of Skobeleff, his services were secured, and, with an audacity altogether Russian, he was instructed to proceed through India to the court of a prince, who was afterwards to be instigated by Stolietoff to make a descent upon the English dominions.

Luckily, we had at the time officials at Peshawur who were not afraid to act upon their own responsibility. Pashino was stopped by these, and refused permission to proceed through the Khyber to Cabul. In vain he made an outcry about stopping "a private traveller," the Peshawur authorities were inflexible, and their action was upheld by the Government at Simla.

"Look at Pashino," said a leading official of the Russian Foreign Office to me in 1882, on my expressing regret that the Russian Government would not sanction my proceeding to Askabad. "Look how Pashino was treated. Although a private traveller, engaged in scientific pursuits, he was stopped at the post of Peshawur and refused permission to cross the border into Afghanistan. If your Government objects to private Russian travellers in India,

CHAPTER XI.

GRODEKOFF'S RIDE TO HERAT

Grodekoff and the English fleet at Ismid—Central Asia the best place for settling the Eastern Question—Russia's plan for attacking us in India in 1878—Grodekoff and the expedition to Khiva—Narrowly escapes death by thirst—Grodekoff small in body but strong in spirit—A school chum of Skobelev's—Preparations at Tashkent for the march to India—Burnaby's ride and Grodekoff's compared—Incapable of supporting a disguise—Ride from Samarcand to the Oxus—Quarrels with the Afghans—Brave demeanour of Grodekoff—His perilous position at Mazar-i-Sherif—The Afghan conquest of the Uzbeks—The Russian uniform at Cabul—Grodekoff's ride to Herat—Reception there—Importance of his survey—His reward—Shares with Skobelev the last Turcoman campaign—A visit to Grodekoff the morning after Skobelev's death

"Chiefs of the Uzbek race

Waving their heron crests with martial grace,
Turcomans, countless as their flocks led forth
From the aromatic pastures of the north,
Wild warriors of the turquoise hills—and those
Who dwell beyond the everlasting snows
Of Hindoo Koosh in stormy freedom bred,
Their fort the rock, their camp the torrent's bed "

"Lalla Rookh"

EARLY in 1878 a slightly-built officer of quiet demeanour might have been seen one morning

quietly reconnoitring the English fleet at its anchorage at Ismid. The Russians and the English at that time stood face to face before Constantinople—the one menacing it with their army and the other protecting it with their fleet. The reconnoitrer was a pioneer of the army, and as he surveyed the iron-clads lying at anchor he probably thought then, as many had done before him, that since the army could not attack the fleet and the fleet could not assail the army, why not fight out the struggle for the mastery of rival interests on some ground accessible to both nations? In other words, why not seek to settle the Eastern Question on the plains and hills intervening between Russia and India?

If anyone had been desirous of demonstrating how closely the destinies of Turkey and Central Asia are connected with each other, they could have scarcely chosen a better subject to hang their arguments upon than the gazer at the ironclads. The slightly-built officer of quiet demeanour had hastened fresh from the conquests of Central Asia to participate with his friend Skobeleff in the crusade against Constantinople, and the Turks now

the same, the Afghans are naturally so churlish and suspicious that they treated Grodekoff at times as a prisoner, and the well-known character for blood-thirsty fanaticism they acquired during the Afghan war displayed itself repeatedly in plots to murder him because he was an infidel. Owing to these circumstances, his ride was an exceptionally dangerous one—ininitely more dangerous than Burnaby's ride to Khiva or Marsh's ride through Herat to India, although less so than MacGahan's chase of Kaufmann's army. Burnaby's ride did not begin till he got to Kazala, on the Sea of Aral, and it was of only 370 miles' distance through pacified and orderly country. On the other hand, Grodekoff's ride from Samarcand to Astrabad was over 1,200 miles long, of which 400 lay through a turbulent and little-known country, ruled by the most fanatic of the Afghans, and raided upon by the Turcomans of the Murghab and Merv, who; if they had caught the traveller, would have revenged upon him the harshness Kaufmann had displayed towards solitary marauders of their clans caught in the outskirts of Khiva.

Colonel Grodekoff set out from Samarcand

The people of the country were Uzbegs, described by Vámbéry as the "best race in Central Asia" When the cry was raised by the Liberals in 1879 that we were stealing away the independence of the Afghans, it was conveniently overlooked that a large portion of Afghanistan was made up of recently conquered states, whose inhabitants were bitterly opposed to their Cabul masters Vámbéry found this feeling prevailing at Herat Grodekoff found it existing throughout the whole of Afghan Turkestan

"These people are crushed and degraded in every possible form by their conquerors," he says "The Afghans treat them as inferior beings It is quite a common thing for the Afghans to resort to their whips, or to the butt-end of their rifles, in their dealings with the subjugated people. I often saw Afghan soldiers, wandering without employment from village to village, fall upon the unfortunate defenceless Uzbegs, and without any obvious pretext whatever, thrash them most unmercifully. And how they used to bully them, when they made the inhabitants bring food and fodder for themselves and the escort! Having been im-

pressed by the might of Russia in conquering Khiva and Bokhara, the Uzbegs living on the left bank of the Oxus imagined that the advance of the Russians upon Samarcand would not terminate there, and to this day believe that sooner or later we shall cross the river and impose our administration upon Afghan Turkestan" If they did this, they would possess themselves of all the outposts of India north of the Hindoo Koosh "Hearing from a thousand lips, from the Russian Musulmans resorting to the shrine of Ali at Mazar-i-Sherif, of the blessings of Russian order and Russian right, and of our humane relations with the conquered natives of Russian Turkestan, the Uzbegs do not manifest any fear towards us, but desire our presence This I saw clearly enough in the warm reception accorded me by the Uzbegs wherever I went, not to speak of what I heard from the lips of those who artfully managed to pass through the Afghan guard and approach my side Said they to me, 'Are the Russians coming soon? Would to God that the time could be hastened for our deliverance from these Afghans! Tell us—is it not true that the Russians are coming

world I think it was Volney who predicted that a time would come when some traveller like himself would sit down on the banks of the Seine, the Thames, or the Zuyder Zee, amid silent ruins, and weep for a people inured, whose greatness had been changed into an empty name Macaulay, Shelley, Keats, Horace Walpole, and others rendered a similar idea in much the same language Mr O'Donovan, in his wild and venturesome ride through the weird deserts of Turkestan, came across the ruins of old temples and the remains of decayed fortresses and viaducts of ancient cities, and has realized the dream that the French philosopher outlined for this country a century ago "

MR JOSEPH COWEN, M P

COLONEL GRODEKOFF, on his way home from his ride to Herat, reached the Afghan frontier on the 21st of November, 1878, the day that the English by their assault and capture of Ali Musjid practically began the Afghan war Long before he had reached the Caspian the victory of Peiwar Kotal had brought the campaign to a decisive termination, and had our statesmen known their own minds as to the policy they meant to pursue, and given *carte blanche* to our generals to carry it out, there would have been an end to bloodshed on the Afghan border even before Grodekoff arrived at St Petersburg But fate had determined that there should be an epoch of muddle and massacre, ending in disgust and tarnished

prestige, on the English side of Central Asia, and an epoch of muddle and massacre, ending in a grand military and political triumph, on the Russian side of Central Asia. The latter was beginning to open when Grodekoff traversed the Caspian the first month of 1879. A few weeks later officers and officials might have been seen hurrying from the Caucasus to the river Atrek, to prepare for the great expedition that was to retrieve the defeat Lomakin had experienced the previous September at the hands of the Tekkés. In their wake followed an Irishman, whose wanderings had arisen from his Fenian proclivities, and who was fated to show England that men of his stamp may render greater services to the Empire than the vote-mongering Members of Parliament that had passed the coercive laws and kept at bay reforms, causing the Fenian movement and the traveller's exile.

The early career of Mr O'Donovan has been aptly described by Mr Joseph Cowen, M P,* and may be appropriately repeated "The romantic life of Mr O'Donovan is one

* The London letter of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, July 19th, 1881

ing to overcome this difficulty sickness broke out among the troops, and in the end, at the close of the summer, an advance could only be made with 4,000 troops out of 25,000. On his way to the front to lead the expedition Lazareff fell ill and died, and Lomakin, who succeeded him, only penetrated to Geok Tepé to experience a terrible defeat, and be driven back with the enemy at his heels to the shore of the Caspian. While this brief but disastrous campaign was waging, O'Donovan was lying ill with dysentery at Baku, and he only recovered in time to meet the remnants of the army returning to the camp at Tchikishlar. A few days later, Lomakin's successor, General Tergoukasoff decided he would have no journalists about him, and expelled the *Daily News* correspondent from the Russian camp.*

* Mr. O'Donovan pays the highest compliment to the trustworthiness of the Russian newspaper correspondents attached to the force, by leaving this campaign undescribed in his "Marr Oasis," although he had been specially sent to describe it. Their story will be found in "The Disastrous Russian Campaign against the Turcomans." I may remark in passing that it would be easy to publish full and graphic accounts of most Russian wars, by ransacking the Russian press and literature. What is often spoken of as "the silence of Russia regarding her operations" is really nothing

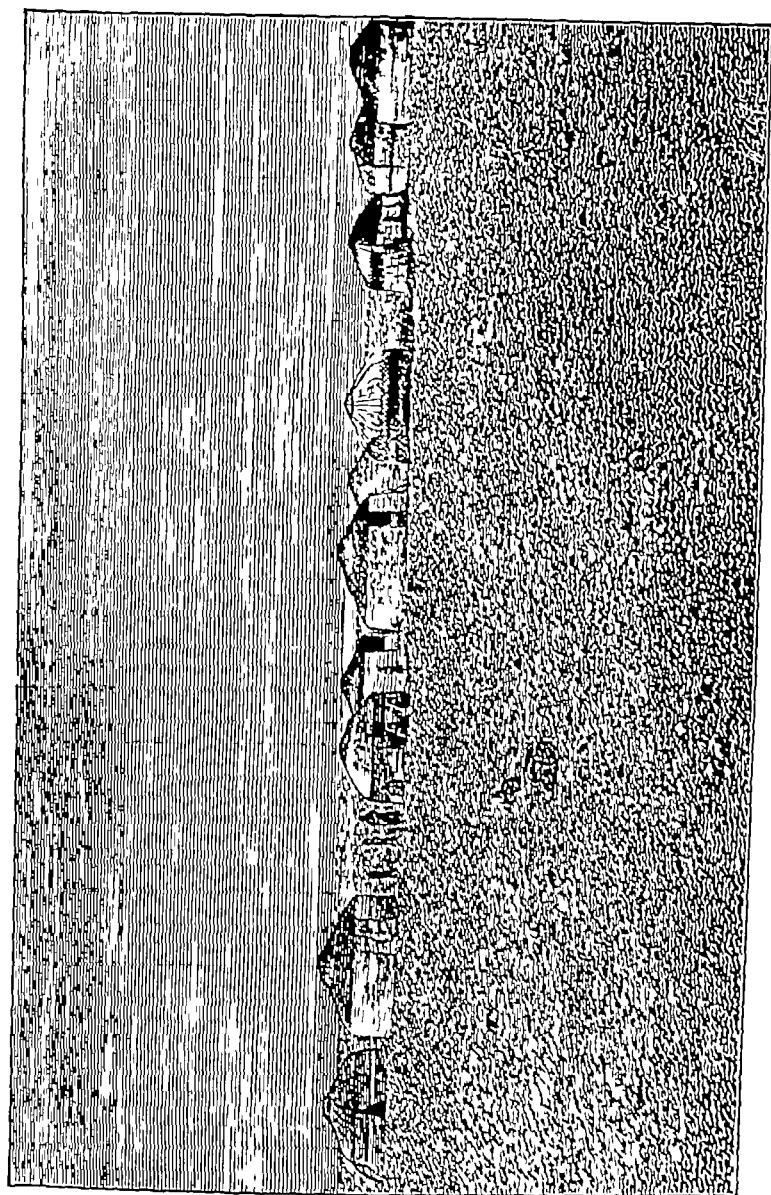
Throughout the rest of the winter, Mr O'Donovan led a miserable life in the villages on the Atrek border and in Astrabad. The only way he could get intelligence of the Russian movements was to go spying about the Atrek, where he was in imminent danger of being murdered by the numerous Turcomans prowling about, and by audaciously dropping in upon the Russians in camp now and again on various pretexts, and getting expelled afresh—although not without having seen with his vigilant eyes what was going on. After months of weary waiting, during which Ter-goukasoff was invalided home, and temporarily replaced by General Mouravieff, Skobelev arrived to take charge of the expedition, and O'Donovan made a final application to be allowed to accompany the force. The refusal he received the *Daily News* "special" ascribes to Skobelev's own disinclination to have correspondents attached to his army, but, as a matter of fact, Skobelev was quite free from

more than English ignorance of Russian journalism and literature. It is unfair for political writers to charge Russia with want of candour and stealthy movements, when the blame really rests with their own ignorance of the Russian language

these rivers be increased and properly distributed by irrigation canals, the whole of the country would become like Merv and Tejend. The sandy patches would be simply blemishes, such as exist at present in those two oases, and in the oasis of Khiva. On the other hand, if the water supply of the Murghab and Tejend were cut off, the oases of Merv and Tejend would become barren like the rest of the wilderness. Russian engineers are of opinion that by improving the irrigation system, and storing the rains, it might be possible to reduce the amount of wilderness to a minimum.

The Merv Oasis has an area of 1,600 square miles, or a little smaller than the island of Trinidad, and sustains a quarter of a million or so of people, belonging to the Tekké Turcoman tribe—cousins of the Tekkés of the oasis of Akhal (their original home), occupied by Skobeleff.

When O'Donovan set out for Merv, the Russians had conquered the whole of the oasis of Akhal, and had occupied points in the adjacent oasis of Atak, also, like Akhal, lying along the northern border of Persia, at the foot of the Khorassan highlands. The belief was general



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that Skobelev meant to occupy the whole of the Atak district, and then march across the wilderness to Merv

Paradoxical as it may seem to many reviewers who considered the disturbed condition of the country one of O'Donovan's chief difficulties, the anarchy prevailing was really a circumstance that helped him in his enterprise most. Skobelev's terrible victory at Geok Tepé had struck such terror into the hearts of the Turcomans, that it had caused them to suspend all their forays and border outrages, while it had further driven to Merv the leader of the Akhal Tekkés, Mahdum Kuli, the very chief O'Donovan had been negotiating with for permission to go to Geok Tepé. If taken for a Russian he might hope that the fear the Tekkés entertained of their enemy would exercise a check on their murderous proclivities, while if accepted as an Englishman, he could almost positively rely upon the desire of the Tekkés for an English advance from Candahar to Merv to cause them to give him a hearty welcome.

But all the same Mr O'Donovan's enterprise was of no mean order. He had not like Burnaby, simply to keep himself warm for 370

latter, on seizing new districts, sink artesian wells and construct reservoirs along all the main routes, thus removing at a stroke the drawback of ages to safe and rapid travelling in this part of the East. What O'Donovan suffered on the way to Merv, early Russian pioneers suffered in exploring the road to Askabad. Thanks to the Russian military engineer, one need not concern himself any longer about water in travelling to Askabad, and this will be the case in due course with Merv also.

During the afternoon league after league was traversed without any new feature becoming apparent, and as evening wore on the party entered quite a forest of tamarisk. "Creeping along in the gloom, we stumbled over fallen trunks, and started all kinds of wild animals from our paths. Some I knew, by their grunting, to be boars, which abound here in incredible numbers. Others, by their pattering trot, I recognised to be jackals; and a few that bounded away lightly were either lynxes or leopards. We halted several times, and took our bearings from the few visible stars. Often we were completely at fault, but these Turcomans, like North-American savages, possess an

unerring instinct which invariably sets them right in the end

"We had been riding pretty briskly, generally at a trot when the nature of the ground allowed, and frequently at a canter. I calculate that, on the whole, we made six and a half miles an hour during our entire journey. After midnight dense blackness came on, and the atmosphere became stifling. Once or twice I suggested a halt, but in whispered tones was informed that there was no knowing when robbers might appear. This I thought rather good, considering that I was in the company of as select a party of thieves as could be found hidden in any desert bush or crumbling ruin. In the end, even the horses seemed incapable of going any farther. The men seemed made of iron. We reined in for a consultation. It was decided to turn aside a hundred yards, so as to be away from the accustomed track, and thus lessen the risk of being attacked by any passing brigands. Amidst the dense growth of tamarisk and other bushes we found a comparatively open space, where we determined to make a brief halt. As we dismounted a bright flash of sheet lightning lit up the

view of the possibility of his being a person of importance who had come on a friendly mission.

The morning after his arrival was market day, when thousands of people assemble outside the fortress to trade. Hearing of the arrival of a mysterious stranger, they swarmed round his tent to have a peep at him. "Long before the sun was well above the horizon a surging crowd had gathered round my tent, the interior of which was also crammed with members of Merv society, all eager to interview the mysterious stranger who had fallen among them, as it were, from the clouds. They were the same sort of dressing-gown-robed, sheep-skin-clad, gigantic-hatted beings as those of the Caspian shore. They sat upon their heels in a sitting position, their folded arms resting upon the fronts of their thighs, and gazed at me with the ludicrous eagerness which may be observed in baboons and apes when some unfamiliar object meets their eyes. I had been fast asleep, my head resting upon a heap of baggage, and my body covered over with a large sheep-skin mantle, but these people waited patiently until it might suit me to let myself be seen, for it is an

inviolable piece of etiquette among them never to disturb a sleeper.

"I was somewhat bewildered by the events of the past few days. I sat up, rubbed my eyes, and looked around me, quite unable to understand the sudden and numerous audience who had favoured me with their presence. Words cannot describe their astonishment on beholding my unwonted costume. My short, black, closely-buttoned tunic and cord riding-breeches seemed to fill them with amazement. They gazed and gazed as though they could never stop looking at the external appearance of the *Frenghi*. It was the gaze of the operator while endeavouring to mesmerise his subject. Simultaneously, from without, scores of eyes peeped through every nook and cranny of the tent walls, and I could hear remarks upon my personal appearance and costume, winding up with a statement of the conviction of the observers that I was most unmistakably an '*Oroos*' (Russian). Let it not be imagined that, after the first eagerness of curiosity was satisfied, this sort of thing came to an end—quite the reverse. As the tidings of my arrival spread, relays upon relays of fresh sightseers thronged

is part of Afghanistan. Politically, the Mervs were willing to become the subjects of the Ameer. All that was wanted after the fall of Khiva was for England to have pressed the Ameer on the one hand and encouraged the Mervs on the other, and the fate of the oasis would have been settled in a manner advantageous to our interests.

Instead of doing this, successive administrations, Conservative and Liberal, shirked all responsibility, and anything approaching decisive action. They meddled with the Turcomans just sufficiently to accentuate the resistance of the latter to the Russians, and to damage our own prestige; but beyond drifting with this dog-in-the-manger and undignified policy they did nothing. Merv might have been easily saved by diplomatic means up to the time of the fall of Geok Tepé in 1881. General Sir Charles MacGregor, Baker, and Napier's advice and practical suggestions covered the whole situation. Still more simple was it to provide for its safety after the conquest of Akhal, for the Merv Tekkés were so cowed that they were ready to suspend all their raids and accept any suzerainty, no matter how severe, that would

CHAPTER XIII.

COLONEL STEWART'S WATCH OVER SKOBELEFF'S ARMY.

England can always rely upon a supply of Burnabys to rectify the carelessness of her statesmen—English officers “haunting” the Perso-Turcoman border in 1880—Stewart proceeds to the spot disguised as a horse-dealer—How he elaborated his plans at Ispahan—Success attending his disguise—A good hard ride, with no “comforts”—Beluchi robbers—Their mode of operations—Arrival at Deregez—Lives alongside Mr O'Donovan for three weeks without his disguise being penetrated—Russia complains, and he is ordered home—Appointed English agent to watch over Herat—Of vital importance to a traveller that he should be able to give a graphic account of his explorations—Inability of Marsh to do this—O'Donovan spoils his book of travels by keeping it back too long—Stewart the only military traveller rewarded by the state

“Among the last three books presented to Parliament there is a very interesting despatch from the Russian Foreign Office that contains a remarkable phrase, in which blame is imputed to certain English officers, who, it is said, have been ‘haunting’ the desert, as if that were a discreditable proceeding. Now, in Colonel Stewart’s paper the Royal Geographical Society can see the results of such ‘haunting,’ and I only wish that other inaccessible parts of Asia were

hunted in the same manner. So far from its being a discreditable proceeding, it seems to me to be deserving of the highest commendation."

SIR HENRY RAWLINSON, 1881.

"It may be well asked what induces so many travellers to go into Central Asia and hunt those inhospitable deserts. Of course, the whole interest of the thing is centred in the district of Merv and its strategic and geographical position, for it cannot be concealed that not only is the place interesting from its geographical position as having been the cradle of the Parthian race, but it is also interesting from its strategic position as connecting the line of Russian advance by the Oxus with that by Kizil Arvat and north-eastern Persia."

CAPTAIN GILL, 1881

It is true that a British general can always rely upon British soldiers extricating him from the difficulties his blundering may have involved him in, it is still more true that England can always rely upon her sons pushing themselves forward in the hour of danger to protect interests which appear imperilled through the supineness or stupidity of her Ministers. A remarkable instance of this is to be found in the case of Colonel Stewart, whose service to the country in 1880 has never, so far as I am aware, been properly recognized in any public form. In 1880, as stated in the previous chapter, Skobelev spent nine months in preparing an army to

Seistan camels, so celebrated for their speed. They and their wives were stripped of everything but the most necessary clothing, and were carried about on camels for three days. One of their party, who knew the country, gave offence to the Beluchis by refusing to act as guide, and was hacked to pieces by swords; another of their party was killed by the Beluchis, and they heard that a traveller had been murdered previous to their own capture. At the end of three days the two men whom I met with their wives were released near Chesma Shuturan, the lonely spring in the desert where I filled my water-bottle. They came on to Robat-i-Khan, and were anxious to proceed on their journey."

"I here heard," continues Stewart, "of the mode of procedure of these Beluchi marauders. The camels they ride travel very fast. They can go seventy or even eighty miles a day, carrying one and sometimes two men and a little food. The longest distance I have ever myself known a good trained camel to cover in a day was ninety-two measured miles on a road. This was accomplished between early dawn and evening, but the camel performing this feat

would not have been able to go on the next day for any great distance. This was, however, not a Beluchi camel. The Beluchis, with their trained camels, which only require water every other day, and which can on a push last three days without water, scour the country for incredible distances, lying hidden in some ravine in the desert, pouncing upon unwary travellers, and driving off camels and cattle wherever found. Sometimes a rich caravan falls into their hands. Their camels can find enough grazing in the less arid spots of the desert to support life, assisted by a little food supplied by their owners in the form of barley meal mixed with just enough water to make a paste. A camel can exist in this way for a few weeks only while the foray lasts. The Beluchis approach some lonely spring in the desert every other day, water their camels, fill their waterskins, and go back to hide in some new spot."

A fortnight's ride brought Stewart to Turbat-i-Hyderi, on the Herat-Meshed road, and journeying past Meshed the party reached Mahomedabad, the chief town of Deregez, on the 25th of November, having been twenty-six days in the saddle. Deregez is a border district

in his explorations by newspaper letters or a book of travel, and consequently his exploit is only known to a few. If through his reticence he has never been publicly applauded, he has some consolation in the fact that he is the only English pioneer in Central Asia who has been rewarded with any official recognition of his services. In common with other travellers, the cost of his expedition to Deregez came out of his own pocket, but while Baker, Burnaby, Marsh, and MacGregor got nothing in return for their outlay, Colonel Stewart obtained a special appointment, with an excellent salary accompanying it. A brave man, clear-headed and full of common-sense, he is just the guardian England requires to keep a watch over such a great strategical point as Herat—the key of India. If the Government ever fails in its duty to protect the place from Russian seizure, the country may rest assured that no portion of the blame will be due to the gallant officer who charged himself in the hour of danger with the guardianship of our interests on the Perso-Turcoman frontier, and displayed qualities which the most famous traveller and dashing scout might envy.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIEUTENANT ALIKHANOFF'S JOURNEY WITH A RUSSIAN CARAVAN TO MERV.

Desire of Russia for a survey of her own of the Merv Oasis—
Visit of Merv Tekkés to Askabad—Invitation to the
Russian traders to visit Merv—Baron Aminoff takes
advantage of General Röhrberg's absence to indulge in a
little frontier intrigue on his own account—Alikhanoff's
previous career—How Caucasians become Russianized—
Injustice to the natives of India—March of the Russian
caravan along the Atak Oasis—Alikhanoff's survey of the
Tejend region—Exciting incidents of the secret night ride
into Merv—Fears of treachery—The people awake to find
the Russians settled in their midst—Disguised as a Tekké
Alikhanoff takes plans of the fortress—Plots of the
Tekkés against the Russians—Exploit of Naziroff in
riding from the Caspian through Merv to the Oxus at
Tchardjui—Merv now completely explored

“ Here stand, my lords ! and send discoverers forth
To know the numbers of our enemies ”

SHAKESPEARE *Henry V*

“ Alikhanoff's venturesome visit to Merv almost rivals in
exciting incident Mr O'Donovan's late expedition to that
oasis ”—PROFESSOR A H KEANE (*Academy*, June 16th,
1883)

MR O'DONOVAN having secured for England
a survey of the oasis of Merv, Russia began to

goods; and there were officers attached to his staff who could be safely trusted to mix with the Tekkés in disguise. Accordingly, in February, 1882, he made arrangements for the Russian caravan to proceed to Merv, and, there is every reason to believe, sent it off without the cognisance of his own Government—at any rate, neither the Minister of War nor the Minister for Foreign Affairs received any intimation of the intended journey, nor any report of it afterwards.

The officer chosen to conduct the survey was Lieutenant Alikhanoff, one of the many officers of broken fortunes who are to be met with everywhere along the Russian frontier in Asia. In England, when an officer misbehaves himself, he is cashiered or forced to resign. In Russia, he is simply reduced to the ranks, stripped of his titles, and sent to Siberia or Central Asia to serve as a private soldier. Such a man naturally becomes a desperado, and forms capital fighting material for generals of the stamp of Skobleff. In many cases they retrieve their reputation, and it is the custom, if they display extraordinary courage, or render any particular service, to restore them to their former position. When

the expedition against Khiva took place in 1873, Alikhanoff served under Skobeleff with the rank of captain. For his bravery during the war he was advanced to the position of major, and made aide-de-camp to the Grand Duke Michael, Viceroy of the Caucasus. Not long after this, for quarrelling and fighting a duel with a brother officer, he was reduced to the ranks, and sent beyond the Caspian to Lazareff's army. Mr O'Donovan knew him well, and tells us that he was a "capital fellow, a brave and capable soldier, and much liked in the camp." During the war of 1879 he acted as correspondent of the *Moscow Gazette*, and wrote the graphic letters which appear in the "Disastrous Russian Campaign against the Turcomans," under the *nom de plume* of "Arsky." How clever he is with his pencil any one can see who cares to look at the admirable sketches he furnished for the recent work, "The Russians at Merv and Herat."

By race Alikhanoff was a Caucasian—a convenient term used by Russians to designate an individual of any of the varied races dwelling in the Caucasus. The natives of the newly conquered provinces of Russia have a happy

tract larger than the oasis of Merv itself. To prepare the way for Alikhanoff's expedition, a Russianised Khivan, Fazil Beg by name, who had been to Merv before, was sent ahead to secretly arrange for the reception of the caravan at the Tejend and Merv and obtain guides for conducting it by the safest route. The caravan party comprised Kosikh, a trader, representing the firm of Konshin and Co. of Moscow, who had brought the caravan to Askabad, and still had charge of it; Lieutenant Alikhanoff, disguised as his clerk and interpreter: Ensign Sokoleff, of the Cossacks disguised as another clerk and a force of half a dozen *djigits*, or native horse, well armed with Berdans and revolvers, and commanded by an experienced and capable chief, Ak Murad Sardar. At various points on the way the caravan was further accompanied by parties of Turcomans, hired for the stage to render the Russians still more secure against any party of Tekké marauders that might be prowling about.

At the very outset the party encountered difficulties. The Merv Tekké camel-drivers on reaching the Russian frontier—two marches

from Askabad—refused to accompany it any further, and had to be threatened with imprisonment before they would give in. The next march brought them to Lutfabad, in the Atak Oasis, fourteen miles from that town of Mahomedabad in which Colonel Stewart had settled down in disguise in 1880, to watch the Russians in the event of their endeavouring to make a move upon Merv. On approaching Lutfabad the caravan was stopped by a Persian official from Mahomedabad, to whom Alıkhanoﬀ said that they were on their way to Meshed with wares, and would give him a call at Mahomedabad the next day or so—a piece of deception adopted to prevent the Persians interfering in any way with their undertaking.

The following day was spent at Kahka, eighteen and a half miles from Lutfabad and eighty from Askabad, which Alıkhanoﬀ had decided to adopt as the starting-point of the steppe journey from the Persian border to Merv. O'Donovan, it will be remembered, started fifty-three miles, or two caravan journeys, further east, from the Atak settlement of Mehna. In both instances, however, the distance of the steppe journey to Merv was about the same.

The people of Kahka are Persian subjects, but they frankly expressed to Alikhanoff their hatred of the imbecile rule of the Shah, and drew up a request to become Russian subjects for him to send to his Government. From the Atak to the Tejend river O'Donovan had traversed the fifty miles of steppe in a night, the Russian caravan, however, travelled more slowly, and spent two days in crossing the expanse. Kari Bent, the dam across the Tejend where they passed the night, is famous for mosquitoes of such a poisonous character, that they even sting camels to death.

In going and returning, Alikhanoff made a more thorough survey of the Tejend Oasis than O'Donovan had been able to do during his hurried halt there. Instead of being an insignificant tract of marsh land, he found it a fertile oasis considerably larger than that of Merv. Formerly it contained 20,000 Tekké families, but the Persians harried them so much that they migrated either to Akhal or Merv, and left the place a wilderness. After the fall of Geok Tepé many thousand fugitives fled thither, and when O'Donovan secretly slipped across the oasis they were negotiating with the

Russians to be allowed to return This was in February 1881 Alikhanoff crossed the oasis a year later, and there were then 3,600 tents, or 18,000 souls, scattered about the oasis, consisting of the remnants of the fugitives and new-comers from Merv These were digging out new canals and establishing thriving settlements In course of time, the skill of the Russian irrigation engineer will convert the district into another Merv, and a warlike population of a quarter of a million or so will grow up within handy hitting distance of Herat

The Tejend Oasis is now completely under Russian control, but even when Alikhanoff visited the district Russian influence was predominant This was not surprising, as Karı Bent is only three days' ride from Askabad, and the Russian Governor had already sent Cossack squadrons thither several times to reconnoitre the oasis and punish chance marauders Thanks to the general fear of the Cossack the caravan was properly treated at Karı Bent, and its march facilitated to Merv

The stretch of briar-covered wilderness between the Tejend and Merv took O'Donovan a day and a night to traverse The slower

Russian caravan required three dāys for the journey, camping twice on the way. On the afternoon of the third day they met the five guides. Fazıl Beg, the Khivan emissary, had sent from Merv. Having marched twenty-four miles since the morning, the caravan meant to have passed the night at some wells twenty-six miles from Merv, but the guides insisted that they should either go on and pass through the settlements of the Otamish at night, or else make a *détour* of several days' duration so as to arrive on the opposite side of Merv, where the second clan of the Merv Tekkés—the Tokhtamish—resided. The Otamish, they said, were so hostile to the Russians that they would immediately kill them; whereas a good reception might be expected from the Tokhtamish. Ultimately it was discovered that these guides, not wishing to draw down on their heads the anger of the people for conducting the caravan to Merv, had resorted to this story in order to induce the Russians to enter at night. In this manner it happened that the people of Merv knew nothing of the approach or advent of the Russians, until they woke up one morning to find them comfortably ensconced in their midst.

This night ride was the most sensational part of the expedition. The first Merv settlement was reached at 11 o'clock—Topaz, a little more than twenty miles from the fortress. The moon shone so brightly that the travellers could easily count the number of tents.

"Our fellow-travellers grew silent. They hardly allowed themselves to whisper. They hurried on to get clear as quickly as possible of the robbers' nest, the watch dogs of which loudly barked a warning on our approach. We traversed it, however, in safety, and also another. The tents seemed to rise at every step like black mushrooms.

"The *auls* consist of two or three hundred tightly packed tents, without any clay dwellings among them, and are situate a mile or two from one another. The entire country between them is covered with crops. There is no road whatever, only paths. Such are the characteristics of the environs of Merv.

"The nearer we got to the centre, the more numerous the clay structures became. Low walls enclosing gardens, melon-beds, and fields, formed, together with the canals, quite a network. Amidst such surroundings we had

already ridden for more than an hour, penetrating one *aoul* after another, when the Mervis and Ovez Sardar requested us to separate ourselves from the caravan and proceed with them ahead.

“ ‘The Otamish,’ said they, ‘will not fall upon the caravan, because the people accompanying it are the same as themselves—Turcomans of the Tekké tribe. The case will be quite different, however, if they chance to see you.’

“Thoroughly worn out with fatigue, we were allured by the prospect of an early rest—they said it was only half-an-hour’s ride to Merv—and the three of us set off with one of the Mervis, of whom the number had increased to eight on the way. Our Kirghiz escort were in despair at our departure. They had the gravest fears for our safety.

“The *aouls* stretched along one after another as before. We traversed a complete labyrinth of irregular canals, muddy roads, and inundated fields. Tents and walls, and fields and canals, succeeded each other in rapid succession. After a while the moon disappeared, and we pushed on in the darkness, while watch-dogs bayed on every side.

"We rode for an hour, for another, for a third, amidst this environment To all our questions as to when we should reach our destination we only received a laconic 'Quickly, quickly,' from the Mervis In the meanwhile, it seemed to us we were being led over and over again through the same localities This circumstance excited our suspicions, and these were further strengthened by the conduct of the Mervis They whispered to each other, they disappeared in the *aouls* and summoned people, to whom they whispered something in secret, after which there was a stir in the *aoul*

" 'These scoundrels are up to some game or other,' said one of us, drawing his revolver, 'get ready for any emergency Remain cool and keep your pluck up I, for one, will answer that that Goliath, Ovez Sardar, falls before my fire'

" 'The sooner we know what the game is, the better,' said another 'I shall empty my revolver among the blackguards, and then put an end to myself'

"A third heard all this, and rode on in silence

"Suddenly we saw opening before our feet

a broad silver band—this was the Murghab, the river of Merv. Still as alarmed as before, we traversed a narrow rickety bridge, sixty paces long, and emerged on the north-east side, amidst gardens and clay structures, reminding us of the Khivan Oasis.

“After a while we came to the interminably long and wonderful walls of the fortress of Merv. This is a gigantic structure, compared with which the fortress of Geok Tepé is but a mere bagatelle. Traversing this, we found ourselves riding on the other side amidst the same surroundings as before. It was half-past three in the morning when our fellow-travellers, with ourselves behind them, turned off the road and entered a spacious yard, with several clay cabins at the side. In the darkness the massive structure had an ugly appearance, and seemed to us to be a sort of trap.

“‘We have arrived. Dismount,’ said Ovez Sardar, in a low tone, stopping alongside me. His eyes had an ominous look in them, and his voice excited suspicion.

“‘What place is this?’ I demanded.

“‘Mekhman-jai Komek Beg—The guest house of Komek Beg,’ he replied.

“ ‘Where is Fazıl Beg, then ? Summon him hither ’

“ ‘He is probably asleep,’ replied Ovez, ordering some one to bring our Khivan to us

“ In a few minutes several dark figures made their appearance

“ ‘Fazıl Beg, is that you ?’

“ ‘It is I,’ he replied in Russian, but in a tone of voice that still further alarmed me

“ ‘Are you a prisoner ?’

“ ‘Prisoner ? No Why should I be a prisoner ?’

“ In the course of a few minutes we were led into one of the kибitkas, in the centre of which a wood fire was smouldering Around this the master and several Tekkés were laying down carpets and felts Ovez and several of his associates entered with us, and disposed themselves around the fire as fresh and as vigorous as if they had only ridden a verst or two These Merv Tekkés are wonderfully strong

“ They began to make tea for us, but we were beyond anything of that kind The moment we threw ourselves down on the soft carpets we fell asleep there and then like dead men,

and slept in the dark kïbitka till late in the morning, when we were awakened by the arrival of the caravan ”

Quite a sensation prevailed at Merv in the morning when it was known that a number of Russians were located in the oasis. A council of chiefs was held, at which Ali-khanoff declared the mission of the caravan to be purely a commercial one, and by mingled threats and persuasion—assisted by gifts previously distributed among the more influential chiefs—induced them to give permission for the caravan to remain for a few weeks in the oasis. During this period the Russian officers, while daily acting the part of traders’ factotums, availed themselves of every occasion to examine the country. Disguised as a Tekké, Ali-khanoff used to slip out early in the morning, before the people were awake, and survey the fortress. Perhaps the people knew more about this than he imagined. At any rate, they never ceased expressing their suspicions the whole time the Russians were there. The Tekkés were always laying a trap to catch them in conversation. Thus, on one occasion, having got Ali-khanoff to dilate on the blessings of civilisation

as an excuse for the Russian advance, one of the chiefs suddenly said, with a suspicious sneer, "If you are a mere trader, how does it come to pass that you know all these things?" "Oh, we pick them up at school, and in Russia the schools are open to everybody," replied Alikhanoff, readily

Still the Tekkés were not satisfied, and the reports of their plots to murder the Russians grew so alarming at last that Gospodin Kosikh, the trader, would stop no longer, and hurried away in a state of panic, leaving his goods behind with the Tekkés on credit. But Alikhanoff, more courageous, insisted on a new road being taken for the return journey, and by proceeding first in the direction of Khiva for two marches, completed his survey of the northern part of this oasis. On his arrival at Askabad, the secret of his journey was kept so well that nothing was known about it in Russia for more than six months, and the public would not have been enlightened then had he not published an account of his adventures in the *Moscow Gazette*

This consisted of some of his letters to Baron Aminoff, but a book is promised of his five

weeks' adventures, and Alikhanoff being as graphic with his pencil as with his pen, his work should be a good one. Hardly so great an achievement as O'Donovan's ride to Merv, Alikhanoff's journey thither was none the less an exploit of which any officer might be proud. If O'Donovan had to bear the brunt of being the first European in Merv in modern times, Alikhanoff had to face Tekké hostility as the first Russian penetrating thither. He could not tell what reception would be given to him as a trader, had it been known he was an officer in disguise, he would assuredly have been sacrificed to popular fury. But there is this very great difference between the exploits of the English and the Russian explorer. O'Donovan went to Merv alone, unannounced, and, considering the worthless character of his escort, absolutely unprotected. Alikhanoff, on the contrary, sent in front a Khivan to bribe the chiefs and prepare for his reception, and the members of the caravan and escort numbered thirteen men, well armed with breechloaders and revolvers, a force insufficient to prevent a massacre, but powerful enough to inspire respect.

Since Alikhanoff returned from Merv, Lessar has been there, riding thence to Khiva and back across the desert to Kizil Arvat. More recently Lieutenant Naziroff has ridden from the Caspian through Merv, *via* Meshed, to Tchardjui, Bokhara, and Tashkent. Both these exploits cast into the shade Burnaby's ride to Khiva, Naziroff's ride being 1,500 miles long, or four times the length of Burnaby's.

Naziroff's adventures would make a very interesting book. He is a good specimen of the secret Russian emissary in Central Asia—of the class of men who glide hither and thither in the East, unsuspected by our authorities in England and India. His father was a native gentleman of the Caucasian province of Baku. He himself was born Nazir Beg, which he Russianised into Naziroff when he grew up. Educated at the public school at Baku, he became a cadet in 1873, and two years later was appointed an officer in the Turkestan army. The following year, 1876, he served under Skobelev in the Alai expedition. In 1878 he went to Cabul with Stolietoff as topographer to the Russian mission. In 1880 he served on the Kuldja frontier, where a

Chinese invasion was expected. In 1882 he was sent by Russia to ride from Askabad to Tchardjui, to survey the sole remaining route unexplored by Russia running to Merv.

Speaking fluently all the languages and dialects of Central Asia, Naziroff had no difficulty in assuming a disguise. To accompany him he selected a native of Baku, Ali Hussein Kerbeli Askar Oglı, and a Persian, Meshedi Mahmed Ali Meshedi Rzi Oglı. With these he rode from Astrabad to Meshed, traversing a road thus far frequently travelled over by Russian and English explorers, then pushed from Meshed to Merv, over ground traversed by Lessar; and finally, from Merv made his way to Tchardjui on the Oxus, the survey of this section being the main object of his journey. Fifty years earlier Lieutenant, afterwards Sir Alexander, Burnes had journeyed with a caravan from Tchardjui to Merv, but he had left behind him only a brief description of the route, and there was reason to believe he had pursued a bad one. Naziroff successfully secured a thorough topographical survey of the country, and from Tchardjui rode on *via* Bokhara to Tashkent.



LIFUTENANT NAVIROFF AND HIS FELLOW FAVORERS OF MERV

In this manner, Russia within a twelvemonth obtained a survey of all the routes leading to Merv. Alikhanoff explored the road from Askabad to Merv, which an army advancing from the Caspian would pursue, Lessar from Khiva to Merv, which would be taken by a detachment from the Russian garrison of Petro-Alexandrofsk, and Naziroff from Tchardjui to Merv, which would be followed by a force operating from Samarcand. These surveys were instigated by the belief that sooner or later Russia would have to march an army upon Merv. But the necessity for this has now passed away. Early this year, when the Tekkés were at peace with the Russians, and were giving them no provocation, the latter treacherously sent a force to the Tejend, and a detachment of it, headed by Alikhanoff, swooped down upon the oasis. There Alikhanoff summoned the chiefs, and mendaciously representing the Tejend force to be the advanced guard of a great army induced them to proceed to Askabad and submit. In return for his success in accomplishing this *coup de main* he was restored to the rank of major, and made the first Russian Governor of Merv.

CHAPTER XV

LESSAR'S DISCOVERY OF THE EASY ROAD TO INDIA

The Transcaspian railway—Explorers sent to report upon its extension to India—Why General Annenkoff chose Lessar as surveyor—Exploration of the country between Askabad and Sarakhs—Skobelev's reference to Lessar in his Geok Tepé banquet speech—Effect of Central Asian travel upon explorers—The country between Sarakhs and Herat—Lessar's ride across it and discoveries *en route*—The Sarik Turcomans—Arrives in Afghanistan—The strategical importance of Kusan—Russia and the emancipation of the 40,000 slaves in Khiva—Lessar proceeds to Ghurian—Conversation with the Khan—Lessar's journey to Meshed—His survey of the Oxus—Momentous character of his explorations—Their effect upon the relations of England and Russia in Central Asia

“Lessar's report of his journey to Herat is very interesting, and the unpretentious way it is drawn up enhances its value in the eyes of geographers. If he had done nothing more than explode the Paropamisus bugbear, which assumed that the mountains north of Cabul were prolonged at the same elevation to the westward, he would have rendered us an important national service, but he has done much more. He has traced with the eye of an engineering geographer the line of the Russian advance, in the past and in the future, from the Caspian to Askabad, from Askabad to Sarakhs, and from Sarakhs to Herat, and he has shown that, as far as physical

difficulties are concerned, there is no reason why, at any time and within the limitation of a few months, a continuous railway should not be built from the Caspian to the Western Afghan capital, to which I may add that if that work were once executed, a week would suffice for the transport of troops and stores from the Caucasus head-quarters to Herat "

SIR HENRY RAWLINSON, 1882

When the Transcaspian railway was completed in 1881, the controller of the undertaking, Prince Khilkoff, had at his disposal a number of engineers, whose services he thought might be opportunely utilised in making surveys before returning home to Russia. Already the original designer of the railway, General Annenkoff, had conceived the idea of extending the line to India, and it was to test the practicability of the project that these engineers were sent forward by Khilkoff to survey the country from the terminal point of the railway, Kızıl Arvat, to the new Russian fortress of Askabad. The distance between the two points, one hundred and thirty-five miles, was found to be almost perfectly level, and well adapted for the construction of a cheap railway. This being demonstrated to the satisfaction of Annenkoff, it was decided to survey the next section of the projected line, from Askabad to Sarakhs, which

lay through a country that had never been entirely traversed by any European, although Baker and Gill, Butler and MacGregor, had gazed down upon the Atak Oasis from the Persian highlands overlooking it, and had penetrated to various points of the region, while O'Donovan had ridden along it to within fifty miles of Sarakhs. It is along this Atak, or "skirt" of the Khorassan highlands, that Russian troops must march to get to Merv, so that the survey projected was of a military as well as of an engineering character. The person chosen to conduct the survey was Gospodin Lessar, a courageous, enterprising, and unassuming young man. "I chose him," said General Annenkoff to the writer a year ago, "because he was a young man, and young men are mostly honest." The enterprise was an onerous one for a young and unknown engineer to have charge of. The party comprised nine Russian labourers, with two overseers to assist in the levelling and topographical work, two interpreters and a guide, and an escort of twenty-one Cossacks under the command of an officer. The transport consisted of five camels and a waggon and a cart, the party

having a number of cumbrous and heavy surveying appliances with them in excess of their ordinary baggage

From Askabad to Sarakhs is a distance of one hundred and eighty-five and a half miles, and if one can imagine the sands at the foot of the southern cliffs of England intersected with fields and canals, and the English Channel the Turcoman desert, he can form some idea of the character of a journey along such a "skirt" from Plymouth to Spithead. The principal danger attending the survey was the possibility of a body of Turcomans from Merv falling upon their flank, but had they been attacked the Russians could have easily retired to the hills, or to one of the numerous settlements of mongrel Turcomans and Persians lying along the route. The field-work of a surveyor is never very interesting, and in this case the monotony of Lessar's levelling operations, extending over a period of several weeks, was unmarked by any incident of an exciting character. The Tekkés of Merv refrained from troubling the Russians at all, and the people of the country traversed gave them every assistance in their power. On reaching

Sarakhs, Lessar returned to Askabad *via* Meshed, where his arrival provoked great talk in England, and drew from General Skobeleff the allusion in his famous Geok Tepé banquet speech—"Never since the time of Mahomed Shah's march to Herat, coupled with the memorable services of Count Simonitch, has the influence of the Russian Minister at Teheran been more predominant than it is to-day ; in one word, the spell of the Russian standard is powerful far away to the east, even beyond the conquered region, and this will be doubtless confirmed by the engineers who have just returned from Sarakhs ' "

Proceeding from Askabad to Europe, Lessar equipped himself with the latest maps of Persia and Afghanistan, and then returned to perform the achievement by which he is best known—his journey from Sarakhs to Herat. Before he started, there was an impression abroad that he would not confine his explorations to Persia only, but would make his way into Afghanistan, which was subsequently confirmed. Said a Russian gentleman to the writer in the presence of General Annenkoff two years ago—"It is curious how nomadized people become who visit

Central Asia. They want to be always pushing onwards. Lessar, for instance, is infected with it, and is eager to renew his explorations beyond Sarakhs." The feeling is not confined to Russians. General Sir Charles MacGregor has recorded that he never comes across a blank space on a map, without feeling a burning desire to go and find out what exists undiscovered there.

Sarakhs and Herat are situated on one and the same river, the Hari Rud, which flows from Herat about ninety miles due west, then turning off at right angles runs for 120 miles or so in a straight northerly direction to Sarakhs. Beyond Sarakhs it is known as the Tejend, and gives birth to the oasis lying between Persia and Merv. One side of the Hari Rud is Afghan territory, the other side Persian. MacGregor, as we have seen, had surveyed the whole of the country from Herat to Sarakhs along the Persian side, and portions of this route had been so frequently examined by others that there was very little left to investigate—not enough, at any rate, to make a reputation by. But the Afghan side of the river was almost completely *terra incognita*. Exposed to the raids of the Turcomans of Merv and the upper

Murghab, no single traveller had ever dared to cross the river to explore it, and the Persian officials were too pusillanimous and lazy to attempt the task with the powerful escorts they always journeyed with in proceeding from Meshed to Sarakhs. In this manner, the country had remained almost a myth. But professional map-makers hate as much as Mac-Gregor to see blank places on their productions and hence, to fill up the gap, had extended the huge ridge, existing at the back of Cabul right up to the Hari Rud, midway between Herat and Sarakhs. Thus, in excess of the Turcomans, there was a mountain range 15,000 or 20,000 feet high, with spurs as big as English mountains, to terrify the would-be explorer of the country.

had little to fear, and his only danger lay in a possible attack by the Sarik Turcomans, a tribe living on the Murghab between Merv and Herat, which had never come in contact with the Russians, and could not be relied upon to treat an explorer of that nation with respect. The Ahelis who accompanied Lessar were dreadfully frightened of these Sariks, and candidly confessed that their only hope of safety lay in the fear they trusted the latter would experience of attacking the representative of a people, which had recently gained such a terrible victory at Geok Tepé.

Luckily no Sariks were met at all during the journey, and only a few friendly Merv Tekkés. As far as the great mountain range on the map, the country was found to be an uninhabited wilderness, in which the Afghans and Persians could not live for fear of the Turcomans, and the Turcomans for fear of the Afghans and Persians. But the principal discovery of the journey was associated with the mountain range, which, on attainment, melted away to a miserable row of hills, with an easy pass fit for vehicular traffic, 900 feet above the surrounding locality. If it be remembered that this imaginary mountain

range, 20,000 feet high, had been relied upon by English statesmen and generals to serve as an impassable barrier between Sarakhs and Herat, it will be seen how important this discovery was. But Lessar was more an engineer than a politician. Ignoring the strategical aspect, he was delighted to find that the mountain range had proved to be a bit of geographical humbug, and that General Annenkoff had hit upon the easiest and best route for a railway from Europe to India.

Having effected this discovery, he says he had originally intended turning back home across the Hari Rud *via* Meshed, but none of his party knew the fords, and he had, therefore, only two alternatives, either to retrace his steps, which no explorer ever willingly does, or push on thirty miles to the Afghan post of Kusan, where he would find himself on the main highway running from Herat to Meshed. He decided upon the latter course, and although he violated Afghan territory, one can hardly condemn his conduct, as he afterwards frankly published a full report of his explorations, and disclosed to England, in due time for her to take precautions, the character of a country

which must, sooner or later, have become thoroughly known

Owing to Turcoman raids no Afghans live near the Barkhut Hills, or ever attempt to cross them to the north, while the Turcomans on their part never pass over to the south except secretly on a foray. On this account, when the Afghan garrison saw the European and his escort advancing upon Kusan from a direction never openly used, they prepared for a conflict. But Lessar rode ahead with his two interpreters to explain matters, and before long he was comfortably seated inside the fort, having breakfast with the Khan, who had seen plenty of Frenchis at Cabul, and was not displeased to see a fresh one.

Kusan, or Khosan, is an important strategical point, of which much will be heard in the future. In journeying from Meshed to Herat it is the first Afghan settlement met with after crossing the Persian border. North of it there is no permanent settlement as far as Sarakhs. Thus a Russian army marching east upon Herat from the Caspian at Astrabad, or from the new position at Askabad *via* Sarakhs, would first encounter the Afghans at Kusan,

promise to be more momentous. It is he who has discovered the easiest and shortest road for a railway from Europe to India—and as the railway will inevitably be constructed some day, his name will be imperishably associated with it. He may further claim to have completely upset the “masterly inactivity” policy of the Gladstone Government, for when he proved that the Key of India was more within the keeping of Russia than of England,—that, in a word, Herat, by his newly discovered road, was completely at the mercy of the Cossack, the Gladstone Government had no other alternative than to meet the altered circumstances by developing Quetta, and giving an enormous subsidy to the Ameer to strengthen his hold upon Herat. Besides this, he upset elaborate English and Russian military calculations, by proving that the best road to India from the Caspian for a Russian army did not lay along the ancient highway of invasion *via* Astrabad and Meshed, but through Askabad and Sarakhs.

It is interesting to note that while the journey which made his name—the ride from Sarakhs to Herat—was the most insignificant in point of length, hardship, danger,

and difficulty, recorded in this book, it has had, and is likely to continue to have, a more important effect on the relations between Russia and England in Central Asia than all the achievements of the other explorers put together

CHAPTER XVI

THE PAST AND FUTURE OF PIONEERING IN CENTRAL ASIA.

Changes in Central Asia since Vámbéry visited the region in 1863—Nothing now left of importance to explore—Unjust accusation against Russia of keeping the results of her explorations to herself—English and Russian maps of Central Asia—The region quite easy to traverse to-day—Results of its conquest by Russia—Comparison of the exploits of the various pioneers—Special features distinguishing Vámbéry's, MacGahan's, and O'Donovan's achievements above all others—Impossible for Vámbéry's exploit to be repeated—Merits of military explorers—The rivalry of Russia and England in Central Asia a trade rivalry as well as a political one—Want of patriotism on the part of English manufacturers—Obligations of Anglo-Indian capitalists to the army—Who may and who may not be relied upon in the hour of danger—A greater reward than all

“ We sailed wherever ship could sail,
We founded many a mighty State,
Pray God our greatness may not fail
Through craven fears of being great ”

TENNYSON

IN 1863, when Arminius Vámbéry set out in rags from Teheran to investigate the condition

of Central Asia, an extensive expanse of territory, nearly as large as Europe without Russia, existed unconquered and to a considerable extent unexplored, between Russia and India. This expanse, comprising Independent Tartary, Turkestan, and Turkmenia, has been conquered and annexed within a period of twenty years, and to-day there is hardly a district left to provoke the ardour of the explorer. With the exception of a few spots in and about the Pamir, and in the steppes between the Hari Rud and Murghab, the region of Central Asia has been completely overrun, and the exceptions are too insignificant to interfere with geographical or political generalisations, or to afford a satisfactory field for the energies of any new traveller. It is no longer possible, in short, for anyone to make a reputation by travelling in Central Asia, and all that is really left to be done is for Russian surveying parties to go thoroughly over the ground, and complete the researches of the early pioneers. Such work, if not brilliant, is at least useful, and there is nothing that has provoked the admiration of European geographers more than the splendid liberality Russia has displayed in promoting the scientific inves-

tigation of Central Asia. In a recent work on Russia, by Mr Geddie, of the Royal Geographical Society, that author accuses Russia of keeping the results of her researches to herself. Never was there a grosser and more unjustifiable libel. It would have been a truer accusation if it had been levied against our own country. There is not, I believe, a single State-aided Russian traveller whose researches and maps are not accessible in a cheap and elaborate form at St Petersburg. Every year, all the maps prepared in every part of the Russian Empire by explorers and topographers are laid before the Emperor, and the majority of them are subsequently exposed on sale in the publishing department attached to the General Staff Office. We have no such institution in this country. Our War Office hoards its maps till they grow musty, in order to keep them "secret and confidential", and then when explorers like Colonel Baker take them to Central Asia, they are contemptuously thrown away as useless. Daoud Khan, for instance, explored Merv ten years before O'Donovan, but his map was never published. Napier's researches, again, were kept secret at the India Office until their

publication had been anticipated by Russian explorers, and were no longer of any use. Numerous other similar instances might be mentioned. On the other hand, Russia has invariably made known her explorations immediately after their accomplishment, and has published maps at prices compared with which those current in London are exorbitant. Whenever I have wanted good maps of Central Asia, I have always found it cheaper and better to obtain them from the Russian General Staff Office than from the London map makers. Even in regard to Afghanistan, which is a sort of English dependency, I have always obtained the cheapest maps of the latest explorations from Russia. Hence to charge Russia with hoarding her geographical resources is to award blame where the warmest praise should rather be accorded.

It is really thanks to this elaborate mapping of Central Asia by Russia that that region has become as easy to traverse to-day as any English country. Wherever Russian authority exists the country is scathed with postal roads, and along these the traveller can journey with facilities for rapid locomotion and with an immunity from danger that contrast wonder-

fully with the condition of things twenty years ago. At that period Central Asia was the scene of anarchy and bloodshed, its markets were full of slaves, the Khanates were ruled over by cruel and treacherous despots, and all the avenues leading to them were terrorised by nomad marauders. Orenburg, which is now a busy manufacturing town, united by railway with the rest of Europe, was then as remote from Russia proper as Tashkent is to-day, the army that is now located in Turkestan was posted then in the districts of Orenburg and Uralsk, and to proceed openly in those days to Khiva and Bokhara was, in the opinion of experts, to invite the martyrdom of Stoddart and Conolly, who had been murdered with every species of indignity and torture at Bokhara in 1842. It was into this Central Asia—not the quiet and pacified province of Turkestan we know it to-day—that Vámbéry tramped his way in rags, and if his sufferings, his dangers, and the distance he traversed on foot be taken into account, it will be admitted, we think, that his journey not only surpasses all the succeeding pioneering exploits we have recorded, but nearly the whole of them put

together Marsh scudded rapidly and pleasantly on horseback through Persia and Afghanistan to India; Valentine Baker's journey was but little more than a hunting trip, Burnaby's ride to Khiva was a bit of every-day travel, Butler, MacGregor, and Grodekoff never lacked food or water, or were at any time exposed to such terrifying danger as, for instance, when Vámbéry stood in front of the Khan of Khiva, while that despot scanned his features to test suspicions which, if confirmed, would have consigned the false dervish to a cruel and agonising death. The only exploit which approaches at all Vámbéry's is MacGahan's thirty days' chase of Kaufmann across the Kirghiz deserts, after which follows O'Donovan's achievement at Merv.

As we have before stated, travellers cannot help it if their exploits are not so dangerous as their admirers would have them be. Every day the world is becoming more and more known, and more and more placed under civilised control. Another twenty years, and the term "explorer" will begin to pass into the category of obsolete words in our language. There will be nothing left for people to explore. Yet a little while,

and the "traveller" will become as extinct as the dodo, and tales of adventure will have to be taken from the books of the past instead of those "new books of travel" which the publishers have been sending forth in such a stream the last ten years. Whoever wishes to make his mark as an explorer must set to work at once, if he waits, he will lose his chance for ever.

It is quite possible that there may be a score of other Burnabys, Grodekoffs, and Marshes in Central Asia, but there can never be another Vámbéry, nor yet another O'Donovan. If anyone cared to do it, he could proceed to the shores of the Aral next winter and repeat under similar circumstances what Burnaby did in 1875. But the possibility of repeating or in any way approaching the exploit of Arminius Vámbéry has disappeared from Central Asia altogether. There are no pirates and man-stealers existing now at the south-east corner of the Caspian, there are no Yomood and Tekké marauders left to despoil caravans or bands of pilgrims journeying from the Atrek to Khiva, the unknown desert stretching up to the Oxus has been mapped, and the traveller need have no fear of losing the road and

perishing of thirst, half of the desert is traversed by the locomotive, and a month of tramping amidst robber bands is thus avoided, Khiva and Bokhara have become as safe to dwell in as any European city—there are no gougings out of eyes, no skinings alive, no imprisonment in dank wells with toads and lizards and other nauseous companions, no perpetual slavery in chains to appal the traveller. All these conditions of travel in Vámbéry's time have disappeared, and the man who goes through Central Asia to-day, like the Rev. Mr. Lansdell has recently done, gains no notoriety by it. In the same manner, now that O'Donovan has dispelled the cloud that had hung for more than thirty years over Merv, and the country leading up to the oasis has been surveyed on all sides by the Russians, no reputation is to be made by riding to Merv as O'Donovan did. Really speaking, the only sensational achievement possible at the present moment in Central Asia is for an Englishman to penetrate in disguise to Herat, Cabul, and Balkh. The exploit would be of a highly dangerous character, but the achiever of it could hope for no particular reputation as

generously co-operated to fix a limit to Russian aggression, or to obtain a secure outer defence for the interests they personally possess in India. It has been left for the Army, whose interests are relatively insignificant in the East, to send out pioneer after pioneer into Central Asia, and those pioneers have braved danger, exposed themselves to hardships, and spent their money freely to stem the Russian advance and cover trade interests which the traders themselves would not protect. Burnaby and MacGregor, Baker, Marsh, and Gill have performed services to the State unrewarded, which in any other country would have been publicly recognised and recompensed. Nor is the list exhausted with the names of these five officers. Scores might easily and rapidly be enumerated, who have penetrated beyond the Himalayas and the mountain ranges to the east and the west of India, displaying wherever they travelled in unknown Asia the same characteristics, which have rendered the name of Burnaby so dear to every true English heart. If, judging from the past, it would appear to be hopeless to look in the future for patriotism from manufacturers and merchants to protect

England's trading interests in the East, it must be a consolation to reflect that there are plenty of military men keeping vigilant watch over those interests, and plenty ready to sacrifice themselves in their defence in the hour of danger. "From rich men and politicians," said the foremost pioneer mentioned in these articles to the writer three years ago, "I have never received any generous assistance. The help that has sustained me has ever come from the body of the English people." And the truth of this will be admitted by all who know anything of English political life. "I should have given up agitating long ago," once observed an eminent politician to the writer, "if I relied upon the wealthy classes. It has been the letter from the admirer in the masses, with maybe a small donation, representing more to him than thousands to the millionaire, that has been my best support throughout my struggle." And it may be truly said that, after all, there is no reward that can be sweeter to the pioneers who have opened up the wilds of Central Asia, than the consciousness that their achievements are treasured in the memory of many generous minds.

All cannot be Burnabys, some must stay at home. But the stay-at-homes are in the majority, and, as votes go, the keeping of the Empire is in their hands. To be proud of that Empire, to insist upon its being Imperially governed, is to minister as much to its glory as to go scouting the enemy on its menaced Eastern borders. Let, then, the patriotic spirit which carried Burnaby to Khiva, and MacGregor to Herat, distinguish us on all occasions when the foreign policy of the Empire appeals for firm, decisive action. Let us exact Imperial rule from a so-called "Imperial" Parliament. Our greatest foes are not the Russians, but the shallowness, ignorance, stupidity, and indifference of our statesmen—those clay idols you and I have worshipped so long, in spite of their muddling and misrule.

By the annexation of Merv, Russia has virtually wiped out Central Asia. Nothing is left now between Russia and India but the two weak states of Persia and Afghanistan, each with a broken, scattered, disunited population very little greater than that of the Metropolis. The Kirghiz steppes, the Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva, and Khokand, the oases of the Turco-

mans—all have been absorbed, and now the Cossack is face to face with the Afghan. To the Russian the conquest of Central Asia is a glorious page in his history. to the Englishman, the diplomatic campaign against his advance, waged by successive cabinets, excites no other feeling than that of disgust and mortification. If the course of the Central Asian Question affords any criterion of the powers of English statesmen, then there is no other deduction possible than that the imagined wisdom of Parliamentary politicians is a myth. and constitutes no adequate safeguard for the honour of the Empire. We have the largest empire in the world: we have the richest. All the resources the most ambitious sovereign ever sighed for are at the beck of Britannia's sceptre. Possessing all these things we lack one essential. Our statesmen do not rule our Empire greatly.

The remedy for this rests in our own hands. It is because we ourselves have been indifferent apathetic unparticipating that we have allowed our honour and our interests to be trifled with by men capable of selling themselves into office and finding themselves out of it for nothing.

LIST OF WORKS

BY OR ABOUT THE CENTRAL ASIAN PIONEERS
MENTIONED IN THIS VOLUME.

- 1 Arminius Vámbéry Left Teheran March
28th, 1863 Returned to Teheran Jan
20th, 1864

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Journey from Teheran across the Turcoman Desert
on the Eastern Shore of the Caspian to Khiva, Bok-
hara, and Samarcand, performed in the year 1863
London, John Murray, 1864

Sketches of Central Asia Additional Chapters on
My Travels and Adventures and on the Ethnology
of Central Asia London, W H Allen & Co,
1863.

- 2 Captain Marsh Left Enzeli, on the Caspian,
Sept 20th, 1872 Arrived at Sukhur, on
the Indus, Jan 10th, 1873

A Ride through Islam Being a Journey through
Persia and Afghanistan to India *viâ* Meshed, Herat,
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3. Colonel Valentine Baker Left London
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1873.

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- 4 J A MacGahan Left St Petersburg
March 23rd, 1873 Returned Sept 1873

Campaigning on the Oxus and the Fall of Khiva.
London, Sampson Low, 1874

- 5 Eugene Schuyler Left St Petersburg
March 23rd, 1873 Returned November
15th, 1873

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istan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja London,
Sampson Low, 1876

- 6 David Ker Left London March 8th, 1873
Date of return not stated

On the Road to Khiva London, Henry S King
& Co, 1874

- 7 Captain the Hon G C Napier Left
Teheran June 4th, 1874 Returned Dec
21st, 1874

12. Pashino. Various journeys

No work published

13. Colonel Grodekoff. Left Tashkent Nov. 6th, 1878 Arrived at Astrabad Dec. 15th, 1878

Colonel Grodekoff's Ride from Samarcand to Herat, through Balkh and the Uzbek States of Afghan Turkestan. By Charles Marvin London, W. H. Allen & Co., 1880.

14. Edmond O'Donovan Left Trebizond Feb 5th, 1879 Returned to Constantinople Nov. 26th, 1881

The Merv Oasis Travels and Adventures East of the Caspian during the years 1879-80-81, including five months residence among the Iekkes of Merv. By Edmond O'Donovan London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1882

The Disastrous Russian Campaign against the Akhal Tekke Turcomans By Charles Marvin London, W. H. Allen & Co., 1880

15. Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. Stewart Left Constantinople April, 1880 Arrived in England April 24th, 1881

The Country of the Iekkes Turcomans and the Tadjik and Merhab Rivers. Lecture before the Royal Geographical Society. Printed by the Society

- 16 Lieutenant Alikhanoff Left Askabad
Feb 15th, 1882 Returned March 28th,
1882

The Russians at Merv and Herat, and their Power
of Invading India By Charles Marvin London,
W H Allen & Co, 1883

- 17 Lessar. Various journeys

The Russians at Merv and Herat, and their Power
of Invading India By Charles Marvin London,
W H Allen & Co, 1883

The Russian Advance Towards India Conversations with Russian Statesmen and Generals on the Central Asian Question By Charles Marvin London, Sampson Low 1882

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